

Birds: Cast of Characters

GOODHOPE	an Athenian
MAKEMEDO	an Athenian
SECRETARY BIRD	servant to the Hoopoe
HOOPOE	Tereus, once king of Thrace
CHORUS	of birds
PRIEST	from Athens
POET	from Athens
PROPHET	from Athens
METON	an Athenian mathematician
INSPECTOR	from Athens
LAWYER	from Athens
MESSENGER	a bird
GUARD	a bird
IRIS	the rainbow goddess
MESSENGER 2	a bird
MANES	a servant
YOUTH	from Athens
CINESIAS	a dithyrambic poet
INFORMER	from Athens
PROMETHEUS	a Titan
POSEIDON	god of the sea
JERKOFFALOT	a Triballian god
HERACLES	a demigod
DIVINE PRINCESS	daughter of Zeus
HERALD	a bird

Birds was first produced by Aristophanes in 414 B.C.E., at the Dionysia Festival in the city of Athens. This translation was first presented by the Aquila Theatre Company, receiving its first U.S. public performance at the Morton Theatre, Athens, Georgia, in February 1997 and its first U.K. public performance at the Pleasance Theatre, London, November 1997, directed by Robert Richmond and produced by Peter Meineck.

Birds

SCENE: *A mountainous landscape, desolate and miles from anywhere.*

*(Enter two older men, Makemedo, who has a jackdaw perched on his arm, and Goodhope, who is likewise carrying a crow. They are accompanied by two slaves carrying their baggage and a variety of baskets, pots, and pans.)**

GOODHOPE:*

(To his jackdaw) What was that? Straight on, over by that tree?

MAKEMEDO:*

(To Goodhope) Oh, damn you! This one keeps croaking "go back."

GOODHOPE:

You stupid idiot. What's the point of wandering about, up and down,
backwards and forwards on this wild-goose chase? It's hopeless.

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MAKEMEDO:

I must be an idiot, letting a crow persuade me
to go trudging around in circles, mile after mile.

*: (An asterisk refers to an endnote, found at the end of the play.)

GOODHOPE:

Then I'm a moron, letting a jackdaw persuade me
to go about wearing my toenails away to nothing.

MAKEMEDO:

I wonder where on earth we are? Do you think we could find
the way back to our country from here?

GOODHOPE:

I don't think even Execestides could do that.

MAKEMEDO:

Hell!

GOODHOPE:

You go there if you want, but don't expect me to follow!

MAKEMEDO:

That bird-bartering bastard at the market. It's all his fault!

Flaming Philocrates, the filthy fraudster!

He swore these birds would lead us to Tereus,
the Hoopoe-Bird who turned from flesh to fowl.

One obol for that jerk of a jackdaw there*
and three for this clueless crow, and all we've
found so far is peck marks on our fingers!

(To the crow, who stands still, open-beaked)

What are you gawking at? You are leading us right over those rocks,
there's no sign of any road over there.

11: Public office could be held only by full citizens who could prove that both their mother and father had been born in Attica. There seems to have been some doubt as to Execestides' lineage.

14: Philocrates was a bird seller and is mentioned only here and at line 1077.

15: The legendary king of Thrace raped Philomena, the sister of Procne, his Athenian wife. In revenge Procne killed their only son, Itys. The gods turned Tereus into a hoopoe, Procne into a nightingale, and Philomena into a swallow (*15 Tereus).

GOODHOPE:

Nothing, by Zeus, there's no way through there.

MAKEMEDO:

This crow's trying to tell us the way,
he's definitely croaking on about something, by Zeus!

GOODHOPE:

What's he saying about the way?

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(Makemedo is struggling with his crow.)

MAKEMEDO:

Oww! He's telling me the way he likes to nip my fingers!

GOODHOPE:

Look at us, what a pair of idiots,
all we want is to "get the bird"
and we can't even do that!

(To the audience)

Yes, gentleman, I'm sick as a parrot.
We both are, but not sick like Sacas,
He's not a native though he'd love to be.
No, we're true citizens born and bred,
honored members of both tribe and clan.*
But we want to be as free as the birds,
so we've upped and flown our country's coop.
It's not that we hate our city, not at all,
its a magnificent land, where all are free . . .
to come to court and pay their fines!
Take the cricket. For one month, maybe two,
he sits up in a fig tree and chirps out his song,
whereas your average Athenian wastes a lifetime
sitting in court chirping on and on and on.
That's why we are on this journey, kitted out

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27: The Greek has "go to the crows!" which is akin to "go to Hell!"

30: The nickname of Acestor, a tragedian who was rumored to be of foreign descent. Sacas was the Persian name for a Scythian.

with these pots, baskets, and myrtle boughs.
 We're in search of a land free from hustle and bustle*
 where a man can just settle down and rest.

45 So our expedition is in search of Tereus, the Hoopoe,
 with all the flying about he's done he'll know
 just where to find such a city . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Hey, look!

GOODHOPE:

What is it?

MAKEMEDO:

Look at my crow!

(The crow is looking up in the air.)

GOODHOPE:

50 My jackdaw's staring up at something as well.
 It looks like he's pointing up to the sky.
 There must be birds around here, let's make some noise
 and see if we can get them to show themselves.

MAKEMEDO:

Try giving that rock a big kick with your foot.

GOODHOPE:

55 Why don't you bang on it with your empty head, it'll make a lot
 more noise!

MAKEMEDO:

I know! Pick up a stone and knock it on the cliff.

GOODHOPE:

All right.

42: All items used in sacrificial rites and possibly foundation ceremonies
 (*42 Rites).

(He starts pounding on the door of the scene building.)

Boy! Boy!

MAKEMEDO:

What are you doing? Don't go calling the old bird "boy"!
You should summon him by calling, "Hoopoe!"

GOODHOPE:

Coo-ee! Hoopoe! Here Hoopoe, Hoopoe, Hoopoe!
Yoohoo, Hoopoe!

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*(Enter a servant bird, who pops his head out of the scene building's window.)**

SERVANT:

Who are you to yoohoo, the Hoopoe?

*(They reel back in terror. Makemedo loses control of his bladder and Goodhope his bowels as their birds fly away.)**

GOODHOPE:

Apollo help us! Look at the pecker on this bloke!

SERVANT:

Oh no! Nestrobbers!

MAKEMEDO:

Hang on, that's not a very nice thing to say!

SERVANT:

I've nothing to say to you men.

MAKEMEDO:

But, eh . . . but we're not men.

SERVANT:

Well, whatever are you then?

(Makemedo shakes out his legs.)

MAKEMEDO:

65 Eh . . . I'm a Yellow-streaked Dribbler, a Libyan species.

SERVANT:

There is no such bird.

MAKEMEDO:

Hey, if you don't believe me, take a look at my feet.

(Makemedo points to a puddle of urine, and the servant bird turns to Goodhope.)

SERVANT:

And you, what species of bird are you?

(Goodhope is wiping his backside.)

GOODHOPE:

I am a brown-rumped turddropper from Phartia.

MAKEMEDO:

What about you then, what in the name of the gods are you?

SERVANT:

70 Isn't it obvious? I am a Secretary Bird.*

GOODHOPE:

You mean you're bottom of the pecking order?

SERVANT:

No, not really. When my master got his wings,
I signed up for the feathers too, so I could stay on,
attending to his needs. I'm the Hoopoe's personal assistant.

MAKEMEDO:

We know what kind of "personal assistance" you give, mate!

65: Apparently, they were so shocked at the sight of the secretary bird that Makemedo has urinated and Goodhope has "shit himself."

SERVANT:

Well, he was a man once. He still has certain longings.
If he fancies a little bit of fish to nibble,
I run down to Phaleron and get him a nice dish.
When he wants to lick up some soup, I run and grab
a couple of big jugs so he can dip his ladle.*

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MAKEMEDO:

Oh, I see, you're a swift. Why don't you run inside,
and get your master, and be "swift" about it!

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SERVANT:

No, no, no, no, no! He's taking a nap
after lunching on myrtle and gnats.

MAKEMEDO:

So? Go and wake him up!

SERVANT:

All right, all right, just for you, I'll wake him,
but I warn you, he's not going to be very happy about it.

(Exit Servant through the window.)

MAKEMEDO:

Good riddance! Scared me half to death, the bastard.

85

GOODHOPE:

Bastard. He scared my jackdaw away.

(Makemedo points to Goodhope's backside.)

MAKEMEDO:

You mean you got scared and dropped your load.

(Goodhope points to a puddle at Makemedo's feet.)

77: The old harbor of Athens.

88: The Greek has "you let your jackdaw go," a play on words between *koloios* ("jackdaw") and *kolon* ("anus").

GOODHOPE:

Where's your crow then? You relieved yourself of it, didn't you?

MAKEMEDO:

90 I certainly did not!

GOODHOPE:

Well, where is it then?

MAKEMEDO:

It pissed off.

GOODHOPE:

I'm relieved to hear of your bravery, my friend!

(From offstage)

HOOPOE:

Unbar the hedgerow, I am coming out!

*(Enter the Hoopoe through the doors, clearly a man wearing a bird-mask with a long bill and a large crest. Makemedo and Goodhope fall about laughing.)**

GOODHOPE:

Heracles! What kind of creature is that?

Just look at his plumage and that great triple-crest!

HOOPOE:

95 And you are?

MAKEMEDO:

Gods! It must have taken all twelve Olympians
to have done that to you!

89: *korônê* ("crow") was a euphemism for the penis.

92: More word play. Here the Greek *apeptato* ("fly away") implies *apopatein* ("defecate").

94: The hoopoe bird has a distinctive crest (***Stage Direction: Hoopoe**). Military commanders wore a triple crest on their helmets, and this may allude to Tereus' former status as a king.

HOOPOE:

I do hope you are not ridiculing my plumage.
Remember, strangers, that I was once a man.

GOODHOPE:

We're not laughing at you.

HOOPOE:

What then?

GOODHOPE:

It's that beak. It looks ridiculous!

HOOPOE:

You can blame that damned playwright, Sophocles.
He did this to me in that dreadful tragedy of his, *Tereus*.

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MAKEMEDO:

So you're Tereus. Are you really a bird, or do you just strut like a
peacock?

HOOPOE:

I am indeed a bird.

GOODHOPE:

Well, what happened to all your feathers then?

HOOPOE:

They fell out.

GOODHOPE:

Have you been unwell?

HOOPOE:

Don't be absurd. Everyone knows that birds molt
in the winter. Come spring and they will all be back.*
Now then, who exactly are you?

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101: Sophocles had produced a tragedy on the theme of the Tereus/Procne myth called *Tereus*.

MAKEMEDO:

We're humans.

HOOPOE:

And where are you from?

MAKEMEDO:

From the land of beautiful battleships.

HOOPOE:

You're not jurors, are you?

GOODHOPE:

110 No, not at all, in fact you might call us juryphobes.

HOOPOE:

I didn't think they had that species in that particular region.

GOODHOPE:

Oh, there's a few, out in the country. They're very rare.*

HOOPOE:

Why have you come here, gentlemen?

MAKEMEDO:

We wanted to get together with you.

HOOPOE:

Whatever for?

MAKEMEDO:

115 Because once you were a human, just like us,
because you were plagued by debts, just like us,
because you hated paying them, just like us.
But then you turned from man to bird and winged it
over land and sea, a bird's-eye view you might say.
I mean, you've walked on the wild side.

109: The Athenians were famed for their love of litigation and their huge citizen juries (see *Wasps*, introduction, pp. 125–31).

We thought that you might be able to help us.
That in all your flying about, you may have come across
a nice soft and woolly city where two tired men
can snuggle up and live in peace and tranquility.

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HOOPOE:

So you are seeking a place greater than Athens?

MAKEMEDO:

No, not greater—softer. A city tailormade just for us.

HOOPOE:

Perhaps you are looking for an aristocracy?

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MAKEMEDO:

No thank you! I've had enough of those farty windbags!*

HOOPOE:

Well, what kind of city do you want to live in?

MAKEMEDO:

A place where the worst thing that could possibly happen,
would be to wake up in the morning and find all my mates
crowding round my door with party invitations saying:
"By Zeus! Get up! Get washed and dressed! Give the kids
a bath! We're having a wedding feast, no excuses!
And you'd better make sure you turn up, otherwise
we won't be around to help when you're in a fix."

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HOOPOE:

By Zeus! I can see you know all about suffering.

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(To Goodhope)

132: Guests at a wedding ceremony were required to purify themselves with a ritual bath and then dress in new robes.

134: A twist on the Greek concept of reciprocity. Normally friends (*philoí*) of the family would be repaid with their support by invitations to ceremonies. But in Makemedo's dream city he would be shunned if he failed to partake in the feasting.

And what about you?

GOODHOPE:

Oh, I'm after the same kind of thing.

HOOPOE:

Such as?

GOODHOPE:

A place where the father of some pretty young boy
would come up to me and complain saying "Hey, twinkle-toes,
That's no way to treat my son, he told me that you bumped
140 into him outside the gym and you never tried to give him a little kiss
or a cuddle, and what's more, you didn't even bounce his balls!
And you call yourself a friend of the family!"

HOOPOE:

Oh dear, you really do love trouble, don't you?
I think I know just the place, a lovely little
145 Arabian resort on the Red Sea.

GOODHOPE:

Good gods, no! Nowhere near the sea. I don't want
an Athenian battleship like the *Salaminia* turning up
one morning, carrying a cargo of court summonses.
Is there a city in Greece you could recommend?

HOOPOE:

What about the city of Lepreus in Elis?

145: A region renowned for its opulence. In the fifth century this was the body of water that makes up the Arabian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean.

147: One of the fastest ships in the Athenian navy, often used for important diplomatic missions. Only nine months before *Birds* was staged the *Salaminia* was sent Sicily to recall Alcibiades to stand trial in Athens.

148: A city in the western region of the Peloponnese on the borders of Messenia and Elis.

GOODHOPE:

Ugh! Sounds bit infectious to me. I'd never be able to forget
Melanthius and his acne, makes me itchy just to think about it!

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HOOPOE:

You could settle down with the Opuntii in Locris.

GOODHOPE:

Opuntius! That one-eyed, big-beaked swindler!
You couldn't pay me to live with him.

MAKEMEDO:

So what's it like living with the birds then?
You'll know all about that.

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HOOPOE:

Oh, it's not bad at all. For a start, birds don't need money.

GOODHOPE:

I suppose you just put it on your bill!*

HOOPOE:

We just swan around nibbling on sesame seeds,
myrtle berries, poppy seeds, and mint.*

160

GOODHOPE:

What a life, like being on an everlasting honeymoon!

MAKEMEDO:

That's it! That's it!
I've got it! What a brilliant idea, the power you could hold!
If only I could persuade the birds to do it . . .

151: A tragic playwright often vilified for his effeminacy, sexual perversions, and expensive tastes. Here his apparent skin problems are being derided with a pun on Lepreus (from *lepra*, "scabby").

152: Opus was a city in the eastern Locris region in central Greece near the straits of Euboea.

154: Opuntius may have been an Athenian sycophant (an accuser) nicknamed Raven for his huge hook nose.

HOOPOE:

Make me do what?

MAKEMEDO:

165 Well for starters, I would make you take some advice.
I mean, stop flapping around with your beaks open,
look at you! Everyone thinks that birds are stupid.
Back in Athens birds aren't worth a hoot.
170 If we see someone running about like a headless chicken,
we call him bird-brained, a cock-up, or Teleas the flighty.

HOOPOE:

By Dionysus, you are quite right! But what would you have us do?

MAKEMEDO:

Found your own city.

HOOPOE:

Found a city! The Birds?

MAKEMEDO:

You really are a bird of ill omen, aren't you, Hoopoe?
175 Look down there.*

(The Hoopoe looks down across the orchestra.)

HOOPOE:

I'm looking.

MAKEMEDO:

Now look up there.

(He looks up into the sky.)

HOOPOE:

Looking.

170: A politician who served as secretary of Athena's treasury. Comic playwrights portrayed him as morally corrupt and unreliable.

MAKEMEDO:

Look about, crane your neck.

(He performs a ridiculous head-twisting movement.)

HOOPOE:

I just hope I don't do myself an injury twisting around like this.

MAKEMEDO:

What do you see?

(The Hoopoe, Makemedo, and Goodhope look out over the orchestra.)

HOOPOE:

Clouds and a great deal of sky.

MAKEMEDO:

Exactly, that's the pole of the birds.

HOOPOE:

What do you mean, "pole"?

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MAKEMEDO:

It is quite simply the place of polarity and everything passes through it, hence, it is called a pole. The pole needs a policy, so colonize it, build walls, police the pole, and the pole becomes a polis, the polarized polity!* Instead of grubs and grasshoppers you'll master all mankind, and if the gods kick up a fuss, you can starve them out with your very own Melian siege.

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HOOPOE:

How?

179: The Greek word *Polos*, punned here with *polis* (city), has several inter-linked meanings, such as "axis," "vault of the earth," and the center of a threshing floor (*180 Pole).

186: A small island state in the Cyclades that was besieged by Athens in 416 and starved into submission (*186 Melos).

MAKEMEDO:

Because you will inhabit the space between Heaven and Earth.

Look, if I wanted to go from Athens to Delphi, I would have to
pay

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the Boeotians to cross their territory. Now, when mortals sacrifice
to the gods, the smoky savor has to pass through your territory
in order to reach up to heaven. If the gods refuse to pay tribute,
then you just stop the smoke and starve them out. Do you get it?

HOOPOE:

Oooh! Oooh! I just love it!

195

By all the nets, traps, and snares of this good earth,
I've never heard such an exquisitely clever idea!
Let us build this City of Birds together,
that is, if the other birds agree, of course.

MAKEMEDO:

But who will put it to them?

HOOPOE:

You will! Don't worry, I've taught them to speak.

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They used to twitter away like, well, like birds, but not any more.

MAKEMEDO:

How are you going to call them together?

HOOPOE:

Simple! I'll just quickly slip in the bush
and rouse my lovely little Nightingale.

205

They'll all come flocking
when they hear our birdcall.

188: The shrine of Apollo and location of his oracle, situated to the north-east of Athens in the foothills of Mt. Parnassus.

189: A region to the north of Attica. The Boeotians had placed restrictions on other Greeks crossing their territory, which was essential for delegates wanting to visit the Panhellenic shrine at Delphi.

192: The smoke from burnt sacrificial offerings rising to heaven was said to form a holy communion between mortals and gods.

MAKEMEDO:

My dear Hoopoe, what an excellent idea.
Quickly, pop in the bush and get your wife,
I can't wait to see the Nightingale aroused.*

(The Hoopoe begins to sing.)

HOOPOE:

*Come my darling, rise from slumber,
Fill the air with your holy number.
Cry the keen from lips divine,
Sing for Itys, both yours and mine.
Pour forth the melody, honey-sweet,
Raise the warble, chirp the tweet.*

210

*(The Hoopoe is joined by the Nightingale.)**

*Through the leaves the song is loose,
Pure notes reaching the realm of Zeus.
Golden-haired Apollo hears her sing,
And to this lament plucks his strings.
Heavenly chords from his ivory lyre,
Inspire the gods, the immortal choir.
Singing together, one voice for all,
Blessed gods cry the hallowed call.*

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220

GOODHOPE:

By Zeus, what a heavenly sound!
She's filling the whole bush with her honey.

MAKEMEDO:

Hey!

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GOODHOPE:

What?

MAKEMEDO:

Keep quiet.

222: This is the *ololugmos*, a shrill, piercing cry, usually made by women at the climax of a sacrifice or at the height of emotion.

GOODHOPE:

Why?

MAKEMEDO:

The Hoopoe's getting ready to sing again.

HOOPOE:

Epopoi! Popopopopoi! Popoi!

Io, io! Ito, ito, ito, ito!

230 *To me, come to me feathered friends, to me, to me,
Nibblers of freshly plowed fields, come and see.
You several species that on barley corn chew,
Come seed-pecking flocks and hear this news.
Fly quickly, little chirpers that scuttle to and fro,
Come here all those that thread the furrow.*
235 *Between the parted ruts, they twitter all,
So come to the sound of your blissful call:*

Tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio, tio!

*Those who like to visit gardens, nestling there,
You ivy-branch peckers must hear of this affair.*
240 *You hill-dwellers that chew the olive dear,
Suck up your strawberries and wing it here.*

Trioto, trioto, totobrix!

*Those who pierce the marshy gullies,
Swallowing down the gifts so lovely,
Those comely, moist meadows of Marathon,
Haunt of the partridge, the speckled hen.*
245

*Those who swoop the swelling sea,
Bring the kingfisher and come to me.
Come and learn this revolutionary news,
You crane-necked birds must hear these views.*
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*Come and hear this sharp old man,
Hear his thoughts and test his plan.
What he is saying is so radical,*
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*Come and hear, come one and all.**

Come, come, come, come, come!

Torotorotorotorotix!

Kikkaboo, kikkaboo!

Torotorotorolililix!

260

MAKEMEDO:

See any birds yet?

GOODHOPE:

No, by Apollo, I have not, and I've been standing here
the whole time gaping up at the sky.

MAKEMEDO:

Looks like the Hoopoe was wasting his time,
banging away in the bush like a yellowhammer.*

265

HOOPOE:

Torotix! Torotix!

*(Enter a bird onto the roof of the scene building.) **

MAKEMEDO:

Look! Over there, there's a bird coming!

GOODHOPE:

By Zeus, it's a bird! What kind do you think it is? A peacock?

MAKEMEDO:

The Hoopoe will know.

270

(To the Hoopoe)

What kind of bird is that?

269: Very rare and exotic birds in Athens. Makemedo and Goodhope may never have actually seen one, but only heard about their fantastic plumage. It seems clear that this first bird is spectacularly costumed.

HOOPOE:

Oh that's a very rare marsh bird, you certainly won't see him every day.

MAKEMEDO:

Phew! It's gorgeous! Flaming red.

HOOPOE:

Precisely, he's a flamingo.

GOODHOPE:

Will you look at that!

MAKEMEDO:

What?

(Enter a second bird on the scene building roof.)

GOODHOPE:

Here comes another bird!

MAKEMEDO:

275 By Zeus! You're right, he looks like something from a Greek tragedy, "Who can this poet-prophet be, hillock bird prancing daintily."

HOOPOE:

He is known as the Iranian fowl.

GOODHOPE:

The Iranian fowl? Lord Heracles! How did he get here without a camel?

MAKEMEDO:

Here's another one, look at that huge crest!

272: The flamingo was known in Greece but was fairly rare.

276: The quotation is from Aeschylus' *Edonoi*, originally referring to Dionysus, dressed in ornate Lydian robes.

277: An unknown species, but evidently rare and exotic. Romans later used the same term for the peacock.

(Enter another Hoopoe on the scene building roof.)

MAKEMEDO:

Hold on, that's another Hoopoe! I thought you were the only one. 280

HOOPOE:

You are quite right, he is a Hoopoe. He's my grandson actually, the son of Philocles' Hoopoe—and what a “tragedy” that was! It's just like any noble family, Hipponicus was called the son of Callias, and his boy, Callias, the son of Hipponicus.

MAKEMEDO:

I see, so this bird's a Callias, but where are all his feathers?

HOOPOE:

He's well-bred, so he's regularly roasted in court, and has plenty of hens yanking his feathers and getting him plucked. 285

(Enter a fourth bird on the scene building roof.)

GOODHOPE:

Poseidon! Here's another, what a color!
What's that one called?

HOOPOE:

That is the yellow bellied gobbler.

MAKEMEDO:

What! There's another beside Cleonymus?

282: A dramatist and nephew of Aeschylus, who staged a version of the Tereus story in his *Pandionis tetralogy* (*282 Philocles).

283: Members of the aristocratic Ceryces family. The excessive lifestyle of Callias was the subject of the comedy *Flatterers* by Eupolis, staged in 421 (*283 Callias).

286: *Ptera* (“feathers” or “wings”) was a euphemism for “penis” (*286 Ptera).

289: A politician lampooned for gluttony and cowardice. A soldier fleeing from battle would discard his helmet with its distinctive crest (see *Wasps* *19 Cleonymus).

HOOPOE:

290 It can't be Cleonymus, he hasn't thrown away his crest.

MAKEMEDO:

Why do these birds have such big crests on their heads,
are they planning to enter the Armor Race?

HOOPOE:

No, no, they use the same tactic as the Carian Hill-Fighters,
After all, crests make combat safer.

(Makemedo sees the bird chorus in the wings of the theatre.)

MAKEMEDO:

295 Poseidon! Look there. I've never seen such a "fowl" collection of
birds!

*(Enter the chorus of birds from the offstage orchestra entrances,
left and right.)*

GOODHOPE:

Lord Apollo, what a flock! There are so many flapping about,
I can hardly see the wings!*

MAKEMEDO:

Look, there's the partridge!

GOODHOPE:

A grouse, by Zeus!

MAKEMEDO:

A mallard duck!

292: The *diaulos*, a footrace, consisting of two lengths of the stadium. In certain versions of this event the competitors ran in full armor, including crested helmets.

293: Caria was a mountainous region of southwestern Asia Minor (modern day Turkey). The Carians lived in fortified hilltop cities.

298: The Greek has *kerulos*, which was a mythical bird that according to legend was carried on the back of the kingfisher. Aristophanes puns *kerulos* with *keirein* ("to cut hair").

GOODHOPE:

And there! A kingfisher hen.

MAKEMEDO:

What's that one right behind her?

HOOPOE:

I believe it is the shaveling.

GOODHOPE:

You mean there's a bird who shaves?

HOOPOE:

Surely you know Mr. Sparrow the barber?

Here comes the owl.

300

MAKEMEDO:

Fancy that! Bringing owls to Athens.

HOOPOE:

Jay, turtle-dove, lark, warbler, pipit, pigeon!

Vulture, hawk, ring-dove, cuckoo, redshank, firecrest!

Purple gallinule, kestrel, little grebe, bunting, lammergeyer,
woodpecker!

(The chorus of twenty-four birds fill the orchestra.)

GOODHOPE:

Oh, wow! Billions of birds!

305

MAKEMEDO:

Oh wow! What a row! So much fowl!

Just look at them, scuttling about, clucking and chattering away.

GOODHOPE:

Oh dear, I don't think they like the look of us.

300: *Sporgilos* was evidently the name of an Athenian barber. It was also a colloquialism for "sparrow."

302: Athenian coins had a picture of an owl on them, the patron bird of Athena and the symbol of Athens.

MAKEMEDO:

They're staring right at us, gawking, and I don't like the look of those peckers.

GOODHOPE:

Me neither. I'm scared.

(Makemedo and Goodhope hide behind the Hoopoe's wings.)

CHORUS:

310 Who-who-who-who called us? What is it? Where is he?

HOOPOE:

Here I am, I called, your trusty old friend the Hoopoe.

CHORUS:

315 Tch-tch-tch-tch-then speak, Hoopoe, what is it you have to tell us?

HOOPOE:

Something wonderful, for the good of us all,
two fine-thinking gentlemen have come to me . . .

CHORUS:

Where? Why? Who?

HOOPOE:

320 I was telling you that two esteemed old gentlemen have come to me,
from the realm of the humans with the promise of a preeminent plan.

CHORUS:

You fool! You have just laid the greatest blunder since I was hatched!
What are you saying?

HOOPOE:

Have no fear, listen to me.

CHORUS:

Hoopoe, what have you done?!

HOOPOE:

I have merely taken two bird fanciers under my wing.

CHORUS:

What! You admitted two men?

325

HOOPOE:

Yes indeed, and it was my pleasure.

CHORUS:

You mean to tell me they're here, now!

HOOPOE:

Oh yes, look.

(He reveals Goodhope and Makemedo, cowering.)

CHORUS:

*Caw! Caw!**Catastrophe! Treachery and treason!**Our feathered friend calls an open season.**Once he dipped his pecker in our fields,**And yet our ancient tenets he now yields.**The sacred Bird Laws have been transgressed,**The Hoopoe has fouled his very own nest.**Those evil humans snare us in their trap,**Our eternal enemies have put us in a flap!*

330

335

We will deal with you later, Hoopoe.

Now for these two old men, the penalty is clear:

Peck them to death! Tear them to shreds!

MAKEMEDO:

Ahhh! We're finished!

GOODHOPE:

This was your cockeyed scheme right from the start!

Why did I ever let you talk me into leaving home?

340

MAKEMEDO:

Well, you bloody followed me!

GOODHOPE:

Our goose is cooked! I want to cry.

MAKEMEDO:

No chance, mate, not once these birds have pecked your eyes out.

*(The chorus maneuvers into military formation.)**

CHORUS:

ATEEEN SHUINN!

Forward! Charge! To bloody battle! Attack!

345 Advance with wings extended, push them back!

Maneuver in a circle, cut off their retreat!

They're cowering like cowards, howling in defeat.

Soon enough they'll feel the anger of our beaks,
there'll be no hiding place among the shady peaks.

350 No refuge on the gray seas, no cloudy sanctuary,
you two men have had it, there's no escape from me!

Let's not delay any longer, let's prick them and pluck them!

Where's the commander? Have him lead the right wing!

(The chorus closes in on Makemedo and Goodhope, who are trapped with their backs to the scene building.)

GOODHOPE:

I've had enough of this! I'm off!

MAKEMEDO:

Chicken! Stand and fight like a man.

GOODHOPE:

No way, we'll be sitting ducks!

MAKEMEDO:

355 You'll be a dead bloody duck if you don't listen to me!

GOODHOPE:

What can we do?

352: This is the *taxiarch*, the commander of a line of hoplites (infantry). Hoplites would be drawn up in lines and advance together against the enemy, pushing until one line gave way and scattered in defeat.

(Makemedo throws him one of the pots he has been carrying.)

MAKEMEDO:

Our only chance is to stand and fight!
Here, stick this pot on your head.

GOODHOPE:

What good will that do?

MAKEMEDO:

Birds don't like cooking pots.

GOODHOPE:

But what about their horrible sharp talons?

MAKEMEDO:

Get one of those skewers and hold it like a spear.

360

GOODHOPE:

Chicken kebabs! But what about my eyes?

MAKEMEDO:

Cover them with a couple of saucers!

GOODHOPE:

Another bloody tin pot idea, out of the frying pan right into the fire!
But I admire your resourcefulness, you could out-general Nicias!

CHORUS:

Chaaaaarge! Onwards! Give them a taste of cold beak! Come on!
Grab, pluck, claw, and flay them alive! Smash their skillets!

365

(Just as the chorus charges, the Hoopoe intervenes.)

358: The Greek has "It will keep the owls at bay." This may be an allusion to the practice of placing pots on the roof containing hot coals to deter birds, or that the owl was Athena's symbol and she was also a patron goddess of pot-
ters.

363: Nicias was an elected Athenian general and commander of the huge Athenian force then in Sicily.

HOOPOE:

Please! Listen to me! Let us not kill the goose that laid the golden egg. These men have done you no harm, and they're related to my own dear wife.

CHORUS:

What? They're humans, aren't they? Our worst enemies! They're worse than wolves, what other creature treats us so badly?

370

HOOPOE:

You can't blame them for the accidents of their births. They've come in friendship bearing precious information.

CHORUS:

What can humans teach the birds? They are our natural enemies, our age-old predators.

HOOPOE:

Is it not wise to learn from one's enemies?
Is not an open mind the best defense?
Men do not build walls, towers, and warships*
because of their friends. No, it is enemies
that make them protect their loved ones.
Should we not do the same?

375

380

CHORUS:

There's something in what you are saying, Hoopoe.
We'll listen to them first. Perhaps we might learn something.

MAKEMEDO:

They're not quite so angry now. Let's inch our way back a bit.
(Goodhope and Makemedo slowly move back.)

HOOPOE:

Moreover, you should do this for me out of gratitude.

368: Tereus' wife, Procne, was an Athenian princess, the daughter of King Pandion.

CHORUS:

That's true, we have always agreed with you, Hoopoe.

385

MAKEMEDO:

They seem to be settling down,
all right, lower your pot,
but keep your hand on your spearshaft,
I mean your skewer. We must
patrol the perimeter.
Stay alert at all times,
we have to stand firm.

390

GOODHOPE:

I just hope they don't kill us.
I mean, where would we be buried?

MAKEMEDO:

In the Athenian National Cemetery
at public expense.
Our tombstones will read,
"Here lies a soldier who battled for Greece.
He gave his dear life fighting off Geese."

395

CHORUS:

Birds! Stand down! Back to the line!
Port your peckers, lower hackles,
ground all grudges in hoplite fashion.*
We must discover who these men are,
why they have come here,
and what they want with us.

400

405

(The birds fall back as ordered.)

395: This was the *Cerameicus* (potters' quarter) to the northwest of the Agora and the location of the best cemeteries of Athens.

399: The Greek has "We died fighting the enemy at Orneae." The city of Orneae was captured and destroyed in 416–15 without any fighting after the pro-Spartan occupants fled. *Orneon* also means "bird."

"Hail Hoopoe, heed our call."

HOOPOE:

I "heed" indeed, and am here to hear.

CHORUS:

Who are these men, and where are they from?

HOOPOE:

They come from the learned land of Greece.*

CHORUS:

410

What are they doing here?

Why have they come to us birds?

(The Hoopoe pushes Makemedo before the birds.)

HOOPOE:

Passion!

A passion for our way of life,

A passion to be with us,

to live with us, forevermore!

CHORUS:

Really?

415

So what's this all about, then?

HOOPOE:

Something incredible! Something fantastic!

CHORUS:

But what does this human get out of it?

Trying to feather his own nest, I bet.

He just want to charm us birds off the trees.

420

He's after a nice little nest egg.

HOOPOE:

No, he will you tell you about a life of bliss,

406: The high style of these lines indicates a parody from tragedy or poetry.

great prosperity, and perfect happiness.
 Words fail me, this idea defies description,
 but all this is yours, here, there, everywhere.
 As far as the eye can see, it is all yours!

425

(Pointing to Makemedo)

CHORUS:

Is he completely deranged?

HOOPOE:

No, just indescribably clever!

CHORUS:

Inherently wise?

HOOPOE:

Oh yes, and cunning like a fox.
 Shrewd, smooth and subtle, a real old hand.*

430

CHORUS:

So let him speak! let him speak!
 I'm all in a flap now,
 I want to hear this big idea.

(To the servants)

HOOPOE:

You two slaves, carry this armor back inside
 and hang it up in the kitchen by the trivet.
 It might bring us luck, or at least a nice stew.

435

(To Makemedo)

Sir, the floor is yours, please make your case.

MAKEMEDO:

No, by Apollo! Not yet! I want a guarantee,

436: A victorious army would dedicate armor to the gods and hang it in a temple, the origin of the trophy. A trivet was a tripod used for holding a mixing bowl. Greek temples also contained sacred tripods.

440 from the organ grinders, not the monkey.*
 No biting, scratching, grabbing my balls,
 or poking those peckers up my . . .

HOOPOE:

Do you mind!

MAKEMEDO:

Nose, I was going to say nose.

CHORUS:

We give our guarantee.

MAKEMEDO:

Swear it! Give me your word.

CHORUS:

445 All right, I'll swear it, but only if you promise that our little comedy
 here will win first prize by unanimous vote.

MAKEMEDO:

Agreed.

CHORUS:

And if I break my oath, may I win by just one vote!

(Makemedo shouts out orders to the chorus)

MAKEMEDO:

Squad! Attention! All hoplites stow your equipment
 and return at once to barracks.

450 Stand by for further postings. Dismissed!*

(The chorus sings.)

CHORUS:

*Man is a liar, everyone knows it,
 Deceitful, crooked, and bent.*

446: *Birds* actually came second behind *The Revellers* by Ameipsias.

*Tell us your story, we want to hear it,
Could you hold the key to our strength!*

*We're not the brightest creatures on earth,
Explain it please, if you can.
We want to hear the good things you offer,
Share it, and tell us your plan.*

455

Now speak, human. Let us consider what you are proposing.
Don't worry, we will not be the first ones to breach the treaty.

460

MAKEMEDO:

By Zeus, I've a "crop" of words you really "knead" to make a "meal"
out of!
Just wait until you taste the bread I'm going to break with you.
Boy, fetch me a garland and water for my hands! All please
recline.*

GOODHOPE:

Is it dinnertime already?

MAKEMEDO:

No, by Zeus, it is not! However, I am going to deliver a great big,
beefed-up
feast of a stampeding speech, and they're going to eat it up.

465

(Makemedo turns to address the Birds.)

Gentlemen, my heart is full of sorrow for the birds.
You who once ruled as kings!

CHORUS:

Us, kings! Kings of what?

464: Reclining, washing hands, and wearing garlands were all features of the symposium. This, combined with Makemedo's edible metaphors, makes Goodhope think of food.

467: Zeus overthrew his father, Cronus, after a long battle with the Titans. Cronus and the Titans were the children of the Earth (Gaia) and the Sky (Uranus) (*467 Heavenly succession).

MAKEMEDO:

Kings of everything! Everyone! Kings of Creation!
Kings over Zeus himself! Kings more ancient than Cronus,
more archaic than the Titans, even older than the Earth!

CHORUS:

The Earth?

MAKEMEDO:

Yes, by Apollo.

CHORUS:

470 By Zeus, I never knew that!

MAKEMEDO:

Because you are uneducated, you have no hustle or bustle.
You've never learned Aesop's fables. He says the lark was the first
bird,
born before even the Earth. When her father died, what could she
do?
No Earth, so no earth to bury him under. Four days he went
unburied,
475 until she had a brainwave and laid him to rest in her own head!

GOODHOPE:

And that's the origin of the phrase "bird brained!"

MAKEMEDO:

You see, the birds existed before creation, before even the gods.
That means you should have sovereignty. I mean, the eldest
inherits, right?

472: The famous sixth-century storyteller from Samos. His animal fables were widely known in Athens.

475: This particular fable attributed to Aesop is unknown, but see *475 Lark for a reference to a similar tale noted by Aelian.

476: The Greek has "That's why the lark is buried in Headcrest Cemetery!" *Cephale* was an area of Attica and also Greek for "head."

CHORUS:

By Apollo, he's right!

GOODHOPE:

But you had better keep your beaks sharp. Zeus is not ready
to hand his scepter over to the first little pecker that taps his oak. 480

MAKEMEDO:

Back in the halcyon days, it wasn't these modern, upstart gods
that ruled mankind, it was the birds! Allow me
to prove my point with an example. Consider the cock.
Long before the Persians had their Dariuses or their Megabozes,
the rooster was king, that's why we still call him the Persian fowl. 485
I mean, doesn't he strut about all cocksure, like he rules the roost,
and he still wears that big red Persian crown on his head.
Just think of his power! Why even nowadays the cock still
commands;
when he "cock-a-doodle-doos," everyone has to jump up out of bed:
blacksmiths, potters, tanners, cobblers, bathhouse managers, 490
barley traders, lyre-manufacturing-shield-beaters,
they all throw their shoes on and are up and out into the night!

GOODHOPE:

He's right! I lost my best Phrygian woolly coat thanks to a cock!
It was after a family get-together, a name day actually. I had a couple
of drinks to wet the baby's head, and come dinnertime I was fast
asleep.
Next thing I know that damn bird pipes up, and I, thinking it was
morning,
set off down the Harbor Road in the dead of night. I'd just passed
the walls,
when—WHAM! A clothes-thief bashed me and ran off with my coat!

480: The sacred tree of Zeus was the oak, and the Greek woodpecker was known as the "oak-pecker."

484: Both names of Persian rulers. At the time *Birds* was produced, Darius II was king of Persia.

487: The Persian monarch wore a stiffened triple-pronged hat, which is compared to the comb of a rooster (*487 Hat).

MAKEMEDO:

And look at the swallow, he used to be the King of the Greeks.

CHORUS:

500

All the Greeks?

MAKEMEDO:

King of all the Greeks, and we still kneel before him.

CHORUS:

When?

MAKEMEDO:

When we are waiting for spring and we see the first swallow,
we get down on our knees and give thanks for the end of winter.

GOODHOPE:

I saw a swallow once; it was payday, and I was on my way to
market
with a mouth full of obols. I threw myself down on my knees so
hard,
that I "swallowed" my bloody cash! I nearly starved that week.

MAKEMEDO:

505

The cuckoo was king of the Egyptians and the Phoenicians,
when the cuckoo called "cuckoo!" they would all get on the job,
thrusting their tools in the furrows and sowing their wild oats.

GOODHOPE:

So "cuckoo!" is the call for a clipped cock to start thrusting!

MAKEMEDO:

Birds had so much power that in the Greek cities ruled by kings

499: The Greek has "kite," which migrated to Greece each spring and was a sign for the end of winter.

504: Greeks often carried coins in their mouths (see *Wasps* line 610).

507: The Egyptians and the Phoenicians practiced circumcision.

like Agamemnon and Menelaus, the monarch always had a bird
perched
on his scepter, and it would receive a share of the royal donations
too.*

510

GOODHOPE:

I've always wondered why in tragedy I've seen some of the
characters,
like King Priam, come on stage with bird-scepters. It's to keep an
eagle eye
on all our corrupt politicians like Lysicrates and see what
"donations" they share.

MAKEMEDO:

The eagle! Why he's best proof of all, Zeus, who reigns now, uses
the eagle
as his symbol. His daughter, Athena, has an owl perched on her
head,
and his son, Apollo, his father's helper, has the hawk.

515

CHORUS:

By Demeter, you're right! But why do they use birds?

MAKEMEDO:

Why do you think whenever we have a sacrifice, the birds swoop
down
and take the offal from the hand of the god? It's the birds that take
it to heaven,

509: Brother kings who led the Greek forces at Troy and frequent characters in tragedy.

512: Priam was the legendary king of Troy and had appeared as a character the previous year in the production of Euripides' *Alexander*.

513: Nothing is known about this character. It is assumed he was a public official or politician.

516: The eagle was associated with Zeus in art and myth. The owl was sacred to Athena, and Apollo is likened to a hawk by Homer (*512 **Birds of the gods**).

519: A portion of some sacrifices may not have been burned but placed in the open hand of the cult statue.

they get the first peck. What's more, men used to swear by the birds, not the gods.

Take Lampon the prophet, he still does! When he's working one of his cons,

he doesn't say, "By Zeus," he says, "By Goose!"

Once you were holy, you were lords of this place.

Today you are lowly, you have fallen from grace.

Now they treat you like madmen and villains,

They throw stones and pelt you with shot,

And in temples where you were once worshiped,

They trap you as food for the pot

Caught in a net, snagged by a snare,

Choked by a noose, you haven't a prayer!

Once they've caught you, they take you to market,

Bundled up and forced in a cage.

Poked and prodded, felt up and handled,

Plucked clean, packaged and weighed.

Caught in a net, snagged by a snare,

Choked by a noose, you haven't a prayer!

But you're never just cooked through and eaten,

They baste you in all kinds of sauce.

*Herbs and spices, sweet oils and dressings,**

You're destined to be the main course.

Caught in a net, snagged by a snare,

Choked by a noose, you haven't a prayer!

522: Lampon was a prominent politician and religious authority. He was satirized by the comic playwrights for corruption and begging. The substitution of "Goose" for "Zeus" may be a comment on the reliability of his oracular interpretations (*522 Lampon).

533: The refrain lines here are not found in the Greek.

CHORUS:

*It pains us to know the truth you have told,
Of the honors our fathers once held.
Thrown to the winds, given for nothing,
Once our powers were unparalleled.* 540

*But now you have come and our fortune shines.
You're the savior of everything dear. 545
The trust you possess from those in our nests,
We'll follow you, we will all volunteer.*

But what can we do? You must show us, tell us your plan!
Life has no meaning until we recover our ancient sovereignty.

MAKEMEDO:

My plan is to found a city of the Birds 550
and to encircle the sky between heaven and earth
with massive walls of big, baked Babylonian bricks.

CHORUS:

By Cerbriones and Porphyrion! A city fit for giants! A Babylon of
Birds!

MAKEMEDO:

As soon as you have built the walls, you must send a delegation to
Zeus 555
and set out your demands. If he ignores them or refuses to surrender,
declare a holy war, close all ports of entry, and deny them access
through your territory. Visa refused! No more popping down to
earth
with their great hard-ons for a quick one with Alcmene,
all Aloses and Semeles are off limits, any infringement of the
embargo

553: Two of the giants defeated by the Olympians at the battle of the Phlegrian Plain. The porphyrion is also a species of bird.

559: All mortal women seduced by gods. Alcmene was the mother of Heracles by Zeus, Alope was loved by Poseidon, and Semele bore Dionysus, also the son of Zeus.

560 will result in instant seizure of all offending members!
 We'll hit them right where it will hurt them most.
 Next, send an ambassador down to earth and inform the humans
 that henceforth Birds will take precedence over gods in all sacrifices.
 Each god will be assigned an official Bird; hence
 565 Aphrodite will be honored by the cock getting his oats.
 A sheep for Poseidon must be accompanied by toasted grains for
 the duck,
 Heracles' honey cakes will be given to the greedy gulls,
 And before king Zeus gets his goat, the kingbird, the wren,
 will receive a sacrificial gnat, balls and all!

GOODHOPE:

570 A sacrificial gnat! That's a good one. Thunder now, great Zan!

CHORUS:

But the humans will think we're just a flock of scrawny old jackdaws,
 they won't believe we're gods. These wings give us away every time.

MAKEMEDO:

But look at Hermes, he's got wings, and he flies all over the place.
 What about the "gilded wings of Victory?" She's got a huge pair!
 Then there's Eros who "sets hearts a flutter,"
 and Homer says Iris resembles a "trembling dove," so she must have
 575 wings, too!

565: The Greek has Aphrodite paired with a *phaleris* ("coot") punning on "phallus."

568: The wren was sometimes named *basiliskos* ("little king").

569: This indicates that the sacrifice was not to be consumed but offered completely to the gods.

570: "Zan" was an archaic word for "Zeus" still in use at Olympia. Its use here may be to make Zeus seem irrelevant and old-fashioned.

573: Hermes was the messenger god, depicted with winged sandals (*573 **Hermes**).

574: This is Nike who was always depicted with wings. A golden statue of Nike was held in the right hand of the statue of Athena in the Parthenon (*574 **Nike**). Eros was a god of love often depicted with wings (*575 **Eros**).

575: A messenger of the gods and goddess of the rainbow.

GOODHOPE:

Yes, and what about Zeus, he'll thunder away and send us his winged thunderbolt!

CHORUS:

But what happens if the humans just don't realize that we're the new gods?

MAKEMEDO:

Simple! We'll raise a regiment of sparrows, deploy them in the fields, and let them peck away at their seeds until nothing's left.

Then we'll see if the humans honor Demeter at the next harvest festival.

580

GOODHOPE:

She'll just dole out a "cereal" of excuses.*

MAKEMEDO:

We'll send down the crows to peck out the eyes of the cattle, then they'll go to Apollo for help, he's their god of healing, but they won't be too happy when they get his doctor's bill!

GOODHOPE:

Let me know in plenty of time, will you? So I can sell my oxen first.

585

MAKEMEDO:

But, on the other hand, if they do recognize you as their gods, their Cronus, Zeus, Earth, and Poseidon, then you must offer them a few benefits.

CHORUS:

What sort of benefits?

MAKEMEDO:

You will send owls and kestrels to wipe out the bugs

580: Demeter was the harvest goddess of cultivation and the principal deity of the Eleusinian Mysteries.

584: A number of doctors were retained by Athens and paid large fees by the state to treat the citizens (*584 Doctors).

590 that plague their vines, and thrushes will swoop down
to eat all the maggots and flies that feed on their fruit.

CHORUS:

But how can we make them wealthy? Isn't that what all men pray
for?

MAKEMEDO:

Easy! The humans use birds to give them signs, you can show
them where all the good silver mines are, they'll make a killing!
Plus you can predict the best trade routes so there'll be no more
shipwrecks.

CHORUS:

595 How come?

MAKEMEDO:

How do you think humans forecast the weather? They watch the
Birds.

You can warn them of any approaching storms and tell them
when to sail.

GOODHOPE:

I'm buying myself a cargo ship. I'm off to sea!

MAKEMEDO:

600 And you can lead them to all the hordes of buried treasure
that their ancestors buried all those years ago.

CHORUS:

Eh?

MAKEMEDO:

You have inside knowledge, you've heard them, when one human
asks
another how he found out about something, he says, "A little bird
told me."

GOODHOPE:

I'm selling my cargo ship! Give me a pick and shovel, I'm going
for gold!

CHORUS:

But what about long life and good health, that is the preserve of the gods?

MAKEMEDO:

You know the way things work on Earth, "If you're wealthy, you're healthy, and if you're poor, you're at death's door!"

605

CHORUS:

But how can we guarantee that they will live to a ripe old age, surely that's up to the Olympians, what's to stop them dying young?

MAKEMEDO:

You'll add at least three hundred years to their lives!

CHORUS:

How come?

MAKEMEDO:

Haven't you heard the proverb,
"The Crow lives longer than you folks,
five ages pass before he croaks."*

GOODHOPE:

Wow! These birds will be better rulers than Zeus.

610

MAKEMEDO:

Yes, so much better!

*Now men have no need of temples,
No monuments built out of stone.
There'll be no great golden doorways,
The birds live in far simpler homes.*

615

*Lodged in a bush, perched in a pine,
Grass for a roost, a nest for a shrine.*

*As a temple for birds who are proudest,
The olive tree will more than suffice.*

*Men won't need to journey to Delphi,
And to Ammon they'll not sacrifice.*

620

*Lodged in a bush, perched in a pine,
Grass for a roost, a nest for a shrine.*

*Man will stand among the olives and berries,
Holding barley and a handful of grain.
They'll stretch out their arms for the blessing,
And some wheat will ease all their pain.*

625

*Lodged in a bush, perched in a pine,
Grass for a roost, a nest for a shrine.*

CHORUS:

Oh! What a transformation, from bitterest enemy to greatest friend!

You've won us over, from now on we're going to listen to you.

*We applaud your words, such panache, what flair!
Now take heed and hear what we swear,
If you join forces here with us,
Help us plan and lead the thrust,
With right on our side we will attack
And force the gods to give our scepter back.*

630

635

You're the brains, we're the brawn. We're ready.
Tell us exactly what it is you need us to do.

HOOPOE:

Yes, yes, to work! To work!

This is no time for twittering about like that nitwit Nicias.

619: For Delphi, see note on line 188.

620: Ammon was an Egyptian deity with an oracular shrine at the Siwa oasis in the desert of modern day Libya (620 *Ammon).

639: Nicias was regarded in some quarters as an overly cautious general, especially after failing to capitalize on his initial successful action in Sicily in 415.

Let us go forward together!*

But first please, come up and make yourself comfortable
in my nest, just a few twigs and leaves I threw together,
but it's home. Would you kindly introduce yourselves?

640

MAKEMEDO:

Of course. My name is Makemedo,
and this is Goodhope, late of Crioa.

HOOPOE:

Pleased to meet you.

645

MAKEMEDO:

Thank you very much.

HOOPOE:

Shall we go in?

MAKEMEDO:

After you, we'll follow.

HOOPOE:

Come on then.

*(They follow the Hoopoe towards the door, and then Makemedo
suddenly stops.)*

MAKEMEDO:

Hey! Hold water! Back up your oars! Come back here!

(The Hoopoe returns.)

How on earth are we going to be able to live with you?
You birds have all got wings, we can't fly!

650

HOOPOE:

It's easy.

644: Crioa was one of the *demes* (districts) of Attica.

MAKEMEDO:

Listen up, Hoopoe, I know my Aesop, the fable of the fox and the eagle,
they tried living together too; one was outfoxed, and the other got burned.*

HOOPOE:

Don't you worry. I know of this little root,
one bite and you're as high as a kite!

655

MAKEMEDO:

If that's the case, let's go in!

(Calling to the slaves)

Xanthias! Manodorus! Bring the bags!*

CHORUS:

Hoopoe! I'm calling.

HOOPOE:

What is it?

CHORUS:

Please show these men your best hospitality, but first, fetch
the Nightingale, your lovely little muse-inspired songbird.
Please have her come out so we can play with her.

660

MAKEMEDO:

Oh, yes, yes, by Zeus! Please be persuaded.
Have the little birdie come out of her bush.

GOODHOPE:

By all the gods have her come out!
I'm dying to catch a glimpse of the Nightingale.

HOOPOE:

Well, if that's what you both want, I will be happy to oblige.

665

(The Hoopoe calls inside the door.)

Procne! Come out and show yourself to our guests!

*(Enter Procne from the door with the twin pipes strapped to her mouth.)**

MAKEMEDO:

Zeus almighty! What a beautiful birdie!
Lovely plump meat, so tender.

GOODHOPE:

I wouldn't mind stuffing that bird!

MAKEMEDO:

What a lovely set of jewels, such a beautiful young thing.*

670

GOODHOPE:

I'm going to give her a kiss.

MAKEMEDO:

Hold on, you idiot, she's got a pair of skewers for a beak!

GOODHOPE:

It's all right, it's just like eating an egg,
you have to peel the top off first.

*(Goodhope attempts to lift the pipes from the mouth of the
Nightingale, who quickly jabs them into his face.)*

OWWWW!

HOPOE:

Shall we go?

MAKEMEDO:

Lead on, Hoopoe, and good luck to us all.

675

*(Exit Makemedo, Goodhope, and the Hoopoe through the
doorway.)*

671: This could refer to the twin-piped aulos strapped to the mouth of the Nightingale.

[Parabasis]

(*The chorus sings.*)

CHORUS:

*Beloved beauty,
Sweet songbird,
Sound this tune for me.
Nightingale,
To me come now,
Let us hear your melody.*

*The strains of springtime,
The pipes' call so fine,
Uplifting our every line.*

Listen you feeble, faint, and frail humans. You weakly
specimens fashioned from clay, turning to nothing and falling
like dying autumn leaves. Ephemeral, ethereal, immaterial.
You mortals are forlorn, flightless, and shadowy forms.
Listen to us, the immortal, eternal, perpetual, and celestial.
Hear from us the indestructible truth from on high.
Be told the genesis of the Birds, the birth of the gods,
the origins of the rivers and how Chaos and Darkness came to be.
Know the truth and then go and tell Prodicus where to get off!

In the beginning there was only Chaos and Night, black Darkness
and vast Tartarus,
there was no earth, no air, and no heaven, and in the infinite
hollow of Darkness,

686: The Greeks believed that man was first modeled from clay by Prometheus (Hesiod *Works and Days* 77–82).

692: Chaos was the first element of the cosmos and means “abyss” or “gaping hole.” “Darkness” is Erebus, son of Chaos and the brother of Night (Hesiod *Theogony* 116).

693: A sophist from Ceos who may have proposed his own radical version of the creation.

694: The bleakest region of the cosmos, lying beyond Chaos. It was here that Zeus imprisoned the Titans.

black winged Night laid the first wind-borne egg. Nurtured by the seasons

it hatched Eros, soaring love high on the wind with his glimmering golden wings.

In turn, Eros flew in by night and lay with Chaos in the vastness of Tartarus

and conceived the race of birds, hatched out into the brilliant new light.

There were no immortal gods until Eros merged the elements together into one,

creating Heaven, and Ocean and Earth, and *then* the race of deathless gods.

Hence we are far more ancient than the blessed gods themselves, and it is clear

that we are the true children of Eros, for like him we fly and we are bound with love.

Consider how many lovely young things have been seduced in their prime

thanks to the gift of a little lovebird. They all resisted at first but,

"Give the gift of a cock, a stork, a shag, or a duck.*

They're bound to say yes and you'll have some . . . luck!"

Just think of all the great gifts we birds give to you humans,

we tell you when it's winter, spring, summer, or fall. You know

just when to sow, because the Crane going to Africa says it's so!*

The Mariner knows to stow away the tiller and take a well-earned rest, and Orestes knows that he must weave himself a nice warm

coat so he won't catch cold while he's out at night stealing clothes!

When winter's done, the kestrel comes to show the start of spring,

and you know to go and shear the wool from all your flocks of sheep.

Then the time to shear yourselves of winter woollies is marked

by swallows swooping in the sky and the summer wear you go and buy.

697: One of the earliest elements mentioned by Hesiod (*Theogony* 120).

712: The nickname of an Athenian thief who stole clothes, a very serious offense, perhaps named for his mad behavior after Orestes, the son of Agamemnon, who was driven mad by the Furies.

We are your prophets, your Ammon, Delphi, and Dodona, your personal

Phoebus Apollo. It is only after consulting us that you would dare embark

on any task. A voyage by sea, the sale of stock, a marriage in the family.

Birds permeate each and every important aspect of your lives.*

When facing a difficult choice, you say: "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush."

When embarked on a perilous undertaking, you are "on a wing and a prayer."

When you have achieved something it is "a feather in your cap," a troublesome servant is a "lame duck," an informer "sings like a canary,"

and when you pass away, you are "as dead as a dodo!"

(The chorus sings.)

So, humans, name us as your gods

And inherit musical seers,

Prophetic birds for all seasons,

Free oracles down through the years.

We won't perch on high and snub you,

Looking down from clouds with disdain.

We'll not be like Zeus and sit aloof,

You'll never have cause to complain.

To you and your children hereafter,

We promise a life of great wealth.

Peace, prosperity, and laughter,

Festivities, dancing, good health.

So much rich creamy bird's milk slopping around,

You'll wear yourselves out and need a lie down!

718: Dodona was an oracle of Zeus in northwestern Greece. For Ammon see *620 Ammon.

736: The term *bird's milk* was a common expression for the most rarefied of luxuries.

(The flute player joins.)

Muse of the briar,

Tio tio tio tio!

*We join your intricate notes
In this glen on a mountain peak,*

740

Tio tio tio tinx!

High on the leafy ash,

Tio tio tio tio!

*Coax my throat to quiver
The holy rounds for Pan.
The sacred air for Mountain Mother,*

745

Tototo tototo tototo tinx!

*Like a bee tasting honey,
Phrynichus sipped the nectar
To make his sweet ageless song,*

750

Tio tio tio tinx!

Step on up, theatregoers, spend the rest of your days enjoying a
life
with the birds, come here and live with us. So many things which
are deemed shameful and illegal by humans are common practice
among the birds. For example, you consider it a great disgrace if a
son

755

745: God of the mountains and wild places. He had a cult site in one of the sacred caves on the Acropolis (*745 Pan).

746: Cybele was an Anatolian mother goddess presiding over fertility and health. She was associated with the mountainous wilds and also gave oracles.

750: An early tragic playwright of the late sixth and early fifth centuries, known for his sweet melodic compositions (see *Wasps* *220 Phrynichus).

strikes his father, whereas with us, if a cocky youngling cocks a
snook

at his sire and causes a cockfight, it's really quite all right!

If you happen to be a runaway slave, marked with the brand,

760 we would just call you a speckled swift, and you'd blend right in.
Perhaps you're a Phrygian foreigner like Spintharus, here you
would be

just a common pheasant like Philemon the common peasant.

You might well be a slave like Execestides the Carian, we'd name you
765 the cuckoo, and you could nurture your chicks in another bird's nest.

If the son of Peisias fancies opening the gates to the traitors,

we won't condemn him, for "birds of a feather always flock together,"
it's "water off a duck's back" to us, for even the stool pigeon has
his place.

The swans serenade,

770 *Tio tio tio tio!*

Winged harmony

Calling out to Apollo.

Tio tio tio tinx!

Flocking to the banks of Hebrus,

775 *Tio tio tio tio!*

759: Runaway slaves were branded forever with a mark on their foreheads.

761: Spintharus is unknown, perhaps an Athenian with murky family origins. Phrygia was a large region in Anatolia (modern day Turkey/Iraq). Philemon is unknown; his circumstances may have been similar to that of Spintharus. For Execestides see note on line 11. Caria was a region of south-western Asia Minor (modern day Turkey).

766: The son of Peisias may be the one-legged shopkeeper referred to at line 1292. The "traitors" were probably those denounced in 415 for their role in the mutilation of the Herms prior to the sailing of the fleet for Sicily.

772: Apollo was said to travel in a chariot drawn by swans from the land of the Hyperboreans in the north to Delphi.

774: A river in Thrace to the north of Greece.

*Through the clouds to heaven's heights,
The throngs of beasts are stilled in silence,
The wind drops and the sea is stunned,*

Tototo tototo tototo tinx!

*The clamor rings through Olympus.
The gods are gripped in awe.
The Graces chime with the Muses
And echo the hallowed call,*

780

Tio tio tio tinx!

Members of the audience, let me tell you something, there is nothing better than to possess your very own personal set of wings. Imagine it, when you get a little peckish and bored during the tragedies,

785

you could fly up out of the theatre, pop back home, have a nice spot of lunch, and still be back in plenty of time to see us!

What if you're a bit windy, like Patrocleides, and you need the bathroom?

790

You wouldn't have to hold it in, wriggling about, disturbing everybody,

or worst of all, run the risk of a very nasty accident. No, just do as we birds do, fly up high in the sky and let rip, you can shit away, come what may!

For those of you who like a bit on the side now and again, wings are great.

If you are having an affair with a married woman and you see her husband*

795

down in the government seats, you can swoop off, have it off, and be back

before you're missed. You see, these wings are truly invaluable!

Take Dietrephes, he's got a lovely pair of wings—wicker wings from a wine flask,

790: A politician who was called "The Shitter" for apparently suffering a bout of diarrhea while addressing the assembly.

796: A 500-seat section of the theatre was reserved for the Athenian *boule* (legislative council).

and he soared through the ranks, squadron leader, commodore, and marshal.

From a humble unknown basket case to an overblown, strutting peacock.

And it was all because of *wings*!

*(Enter Makemedo and Goodhope from the door, dressed as birds.)**

MAKEMEDO:

Will you look at that! Great Zeus! I can honestly say that I have never, ever seen a more ridiculous sight in all my life!

GOODHOPE:

What's so funny?

MAKEMEDO:

You are in those wings! What do you look like?

I know, a badly painted decoy duck!

GOODHOPE:

Well, you look like a blackbird with a bowl-cut!

MAKEMEDO:

Well, these comparisons were inflicted on us

"not by another but by our own feathers," to quote Aeschylus.

CHORUS:

So tell us, what do we do next?

800: A man who climbed through the ranks of Athenian public starting as a manufacturer of basket flasks, which had large handles called "wings." Aristophanes actually calls Dieitrephes a "horsecock" after a mythological creature (*800 Horsecock).

806: Slaves received cheap "pudding-basin" haircuts, and no self-respecting freeman would wear such a style.

808: From Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (Fr. 139. 4–5), attributed to Achilles on the death of Patroclus, speaking of an eagle shot by an arrow with eagle-feather flights.

MAKEMEDO:

First of all, we need a grand name for our new city,
then we must make the inaugural sacrifice.

810

CHORUS:

Yes, yes, you're quite right.

MAKEMEDO:

Now then, let's see, what should we call this new city?

CHORUS:

What about a strong laconic name like Sparta?

MAKEMEDO:

By Heracles! I'm not naming it Sparta. I hate them so much
I won't even use esparto grass for my mattress.

815

GOODHOPE:

Quite right, I'd rather sleep on the floor.

CHORUS:

Well, what shall we name it then?

GOODHOPE:

Something that sums up this place, the cloudiness,
the airiness, the sheer elevation of it all.

MAKEMEDO:

I've got it! What about "CLOUDCUCKOOLAND!"

CHORUS:

Oh yes! Yes! What a beautiful name, very long, very impressive.

820

817: A type of grass twisted into twine and used as strapping for a bed.

819: *Nephelokokkygia* (Cloudcuckooland) contains a second meaning, "Trap for chattering idiots," derived from *Nephelê* (bird-net) and *kokkuges* (chattering idiots) (*819 Cloudcuckooland).

GOODHOPE:

Yes, Cloudcuckooland, “where Theogenes’ cash is not a joke and Aeschines’ wealth won’t vanish like smoke.”

MAKEMEDO:

I think they’d be better off on the “windy” plain of Phlegra where the gods out-boasted the entire race of giants.

825

CHORUS:

What a dazzling city this will be. But which of the gods will be our patron? Who will wear the sacred robe?

GOODHOPE:

What about Athena of the City?

MAKEMEDO:

And just how will we maintain order in a city where our god is a woman wearing armor and carrying a spear, while Cleisthenes sits at home shuffling his shuttle?*

830

CHORUS:

Then who will guard our citadel?

MAKEMEDO:

The birds, of course! We’ll line the walls with fighting cocks, they’re certainly not chickens, they’re the chicks of Ares!

GOODHOPE:

The cocks of war! Just right for roosting on rocks.*

835

821: A merchant, shipowner, and minor politician nicknamed “Smoky” (i.e., “full of hot air”) for his vain boasting.

822: A politician also ridiculed for bragging (see *Wasps* lines 459 and 1243).

827: Athena’s statue on the Acropolis received a new woven robe every four years during the Panathenaea festival (***Robe**).

831: A character frequently portrayed by Aristophanes as highly effeminate (see *Clouds* line 355).

MAKEMEDO:

(To Goodhope) I need you to flutter off, up into thin air,
and go and help the builders of our wall, there's a good chap.
Make sure they have enough materials, bring them some bricks
and mortar,

don't forget to carry a hod, and watch yourself on scaffold,
make sure you don't fall or anything! Stay up there at night
and keep the watch fires smoldering, make sure the sentries
are posted, chime the guard bell, and be certain to do the rounds. 840

(To the birds)

Send out two messengers, one to the gods on Olympus and one
down to the humans.

We need to herald the founding of Cloudcuckooland and deliver
our ultimatum.

GOODHOPE:

Hey! What are you going to be doing while I'm working away? 845

MAKEMEDO:

You must go where you are needed, my dear friend,
and you are needed out there to get all this done.

(As a dejected Goodhope exits)

My work is here, I have to send for a priest, organize
a sacred procession, and sacrifice to the new gods.

(He calls to a servant.)

Boys! Boys! Fetch the basket and the holy water! 850

*(Exit Makemedo through the doors. The chorus sings as the
servants bring out a vase of holy water and a basket. The aulos
player comes onstage to accompany the chorus.)*

CHORUS:

*We do agree, we all consent,
The sacred rites we'll implement.
We'll walk in step and sing the hymn,
We will offer the gods a nice victim.
Chapter and verse we will quote,
As we sacrifice a sheep or goat.*

855

*Chirp the trill of Apollo's shout,
Have Chaeris get his pipe to play us out.*

(Enter Makemedo with the Priest through the doors and into the orchestra to the central altar.)

MAKEMEDO:

What a terrible row!

(To the aulos player)

Will you stop blowing that pipe!

(Makemedo examines the aulos player.)

860 By Heracles, what on earth is this? I've seen it all now,
a raven, croaking away with a piper's markings.

(Exit flautist offstage.)

Right then, priest, it's time to sacrifice to our new gods.

PRIEST:

Then let us begin. Where is the boy with the basket?

(The servants bring the basket and water jug.)

865 Let us pray. O Hestia the nestmaker, O holy Hawk of the hearth.
To all the cocks and hens of Olympus. . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Let us pray to the birds of prey, to the Lord of the sea . . . gulls!

PRIEST:

To the Swan of Apollo, to Leto's Mother Goose,
870 to Artemis the Woodlark . . .

857: Chaeris was evidently a well-known aulos player and is mentioned in several comedies (*858 Chaeris).

861: A reference to the *phorbeia*, the leather strap that was worn by the aulos player to hold his cheeks in place.

865: Hestia was the goddess of the hearth and invoked first in sacrificial rites.

870: For Apollo and swans see note on line 772. Leto was the mother of Apollo and Artemis, the virgin huntress and protector of wild animals.

MAKEMEDO:

... no more our virgin matriarch!

PRIEST:

O Sabazius the Oriental Cuckoo, Cybele, Ostrich Mother,
Come now, be here with us . . .

875

MAKEMEDO:

... and bring your fat son, Cleocritus!

PRIEST:

Give your blessing to Clouducuckooland, bring health and wealth,
keep them all free from harm both here and in Chios . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Not Chios again. It's ridiculous!

880

PRIEST:

And all you ornithological Heroes, the many Gulls, Vultures,
Buzzards and Crows, the Ravens, Widgeons, Rooks and Pigeons,
The Crossbills, Creepers, Magpies and Wheatears,
The Chiffchaffs and Skimmers the . . .

885

MAKEMEDO:

Stop! Stop! You idiot! You fool! What the hell are you doing
summoning
all these vultures and seagulls to our celebration. Do you think I
want
the likes of those filthy, gluttonous birds spoiling the festivities!
Chiffchaff! More like riffraff! Now piss off and take your wreaths
with you! I'll just have to finish the sacrifice off myself.

890

875: An Eastern god closely associated with Dionysus (see *Wasps* *9 **Sabazius**). For Cybele see note on line 746.

877: Cleocritus was possibly an archon in 413–12. He was ridiculed for his obesity, lowly origins, and sexual perversions.

880: Chios, a large island state off the western coast of modern day Turkey, was an autonomous member of the Athenian League. In recognition of its loyalty it was decreed that all prayers for the welfare of Athens should also mention Chios.

(Exit Priest offstage.)

CHORUS:

895 *It's plain to see that once again*
We must now sing another amen.
Retract that hymn we sang sublime,
Recall the gods—just one this time!
Our sacrifice is short on meat,
 900 *We've barely got enough to eat.*
Our offering is quite forlorn
Just skin and bones, all beard and horn.

MAKEMEDO:

Right then, back to the sacrifice. Let us wing our prayers to
 heaven . . .

*(Enter the Poet.)**

POET:

Of Clouducuckooland,
The blessed I sing
Beloved by the Muse,
 905 *Hear my hymn.*

MAKEMEDO:

By all the gods! Who let him in?

(To the Poet)

And who or what might you be?

POET:

A honey-tongued singer
Of glorious news,
Like Homer before me,
 910 *I serve the great Muse.*

904: As in the opening line of Homer's *Iliad* (1.1), the poet invokes the Muse.

MAKEMEDO:

In other words, you're a slave with long hair.

POET:

*No, a poet par excellence
Come to enthuse,
Like Homer before me,
I serve the great Muse.*

MAKEMEDO:

All I can say is the "great Muse" hasn't served you very well, mate!
Just look at the state of you! What cloud did you float in on?

915

POET:

I came to sing the praises of Cloudcuckooland,
and I have specially composed a number of dithyrambs
and virgin songs in the style of Simonides.

MAKEMEDO:

Really, and when did you write these lovely little ditties?

920

POET:

Oh, I have been praising this marvelous city for ages.

MAKEMEDO:

That's rubbish, I haven't even finished the inaugural rites,
the place is in its infancy, I've only just named it!

POET:

*The word of the Muse
Runs swiftly the course,*

911: Slaves wore their hair short (see note on line 806); however, very long hair was fashionable among the rich young men and intellectual elite of Athens. Hair was also worn long by Spartans and those who cared little about grooming.

919: Simonides (c.556–468) was a renowned creator of lyric poetry, dithyrambs, and popular songs. In the late fifth century he had gained something of a reputation for being old fashioned. See *Clouds* 1356.

*Faster than even
A galloping horse.*

*Oh, founder of Etna,
Named for the holy fire,
Just tilt thy holy head,
And this poet's been hired!*

MAKEMEDO:

This one's not going to stop bothering me,
unless I give him something to go away.

(To a servant)

Hey! Take off your leather jerkin and give it to this "inspired" poet.

(The servant removes his coat and gives it to the Poet.)

If you're half as numb as your poetry, you'll need these.

POET:

*For the sake of my Muse, I'll accept this gift,
My heart will be warm like a cinder.
I'll thank you now, and your spirit will lift
As I recite a few lines of Pindar.*

MAKEMEDO:

There's no getting rid of this one!

POET:

*He resides with Scythian tribesmen,
With no woven tunic to wear.
His skin is exposed to the elements,
His shivering bottom laid bare!*

930: Based on an ode by the lyric poet Pindar (*Fr.* 105a), composed for Hieron the tyrant of Syracuse, who founded a city in 475 B.C.E. near Mt. Etna. Pindar himself despised the notion of the "poet for hire" (*Isthm.* 2.6).

941: The poet continues the version of the Pindaric ode he began at line 926 (*Fr.* 105b).

MAKEMEDO:

You need something to clothe the font of all this “magnificent genius.”

(To the slave)

Come on, give him your underwear!

(The slave takes off his underwear and stands naked and shivering as Makemedo gives it to the Poet.)

Here you are, just the thing
for man who talks out of his arse. Now be off with you, and don't
come back!

POET:

I'm going, and as I depart, I shall create one more great work.

*Golden throned Muse,
From this shivery place I go,
Along the many pathways,
Forging through the snow.*

950

Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

(Exit Poet.)

The nerve! Moaning about the cold after we completely clothed him,
and how, by Zeus, did that pathetic poetic find out about us so fast?
Oh well, he's gone now and on with the sacrifice. Pray, silence!

955

(To the servants)

Take the holy water and go around the altar again.

*(Makemedo raises the knife to kill the offering. Enter Prophet.)**

PROPHET:

Hold! Stay that blade. Let no harm befall thy goat!

957: Holy water was sprinkled around the altar and on the participants of the sacrifice to consecrate and cleanse.

MAKEMEDO:

960 Says who?

PROPHET:

Say I, the Pious Prophet.

MAKEMEDO:

Well, "pious" off! There's nothing you can "prophet" from here.

PROPHET:

Sacrilege! You think so little of heaven's decrees?

I bring the voice of Prophet Bacis of Boeotia,

a revelation, a message, a prophecy for Cloudcuckooland.

MAKEMEDO:

It's too late now, you idiot! I've already founded the city.

965 Why didn't you come earlier?

PROPHET:

I was held back by the power of the godhead.

MAKEMEDO:

Oh, really? Go on then, get on with it, let's hear this oracle of yours.

(The Prophet unrolls a large scroll.)

PROPHET:

"When the wolf packs merge with the flocks of Crows,
where the river of Sicyon and Corinth flows . . ."

963: A renowned seer whose prophecies had been circulating since the early fifth century. The plays of Aristophanes make several references to false prophets and ragtag soothsayers attempting to use Bacis' reputation for their own enrichment (*963 Bacis).

968: These are both proverbial impossibilities. Wolves would never live with crows in nature. Perhaps this is a reference to Makemedo among the birds. "Between Sicyon and Corinth" meant "nowhere land," as these two cities of the northeastern Peloponnese bordered each other and had no land between them at all (*968 Sicyon and Corinth).

MAKEMEDO:

Corinth? What's Corinth got to do with me?

PROPHET:

It's a prophetic metaphor of course, it means the air.

The prophecy continues,

"An offering to Pandora you must make
a white fleeced ram, you must take,
and for the bringer of this oracular news,
give a fine cloak and a new pair of shoes."

970

MAKEMEDO:

It says that I have to give you a cloak and shoes?

PROPHET:

I only interpret the signs. If sir would care to consult the sacred scrolls?

(The Prophet quickly passes the scroll in front of Makemedo, not giving him enough time to read it.)

If I may be allowed to continue,

"And in regard for my prophet's trouble and time,
give him the kidney and a cup full of wine."

975

MAKEMEDO:

It says you get the kidney, does it? That's the best bit.

PROPHET:

If sir would care to consult the sacred scrolls?

(The prophet swipes the scrolls in front of Makemedo again.)

They continue,

969: Corinth was a longstanding enemy of Athens.

972: Pandora, worshiped as a chthonic goddess, is invoked for comic effect inasmuch as her name means "all-giving."

976: The innards of the sacrificial animal were dedicated to the gods, as was a cup of wine poured as a libation.

978: A parody of a famous oracle foretelling the future success of Athens.

"Heed these words and eagle's wings will bring luck,
dare to ignore them and live life as a duck."

MAKEMEDO:

980

Is that really what it says?

PROPHET:

If sir would care to consult the sacred scrolls?

(The Prophet starts to swipe the scrolls, but Makemedo stops him.)

MAKEMEDO:

You know, it's funny, but your oracles seem quite different from
mine,
and I took these down just as Apollo told them to me:

(Makemedo grabs the scroll.)

"A fraudulent scoundrel you will meet
demanding presents and plenty to eat,
give him no clothing, feed him no meat,
take a stick to his arse, and savagely beat!"

985

PROPHET:

I can't believe it says that!

MAKEMEDO:

If sir would care to consult the sacred scrolls?

(Makemedo grabs the Prophet and roughly swipes the scroll in front of him.)

It goes on:

"If stories of eagles this faker should tell,
despite Diopeithes and Lampon as well,

979: Instead of "duck" the Greek has "rock thrush," a small insignificant bird that inhabited mountain areas.

987: For Lampon see *522 **Lampon**. Diopeithes was a politician and a religious expert who had proposed a decree against the practices of certain philosophers, such as Anaxagoras, alleged to be working against proper religious law (see *Wasps* *380 **Diopeithes**).

beat him harder and send him to hell!"

PROPHET:

It doesn't really say that, does it?

MAKEMEDO:

I've had enough of you. I'm going to take these damn sacred scrolls and shove them right up your . . .

990

(The Prophet flees pursued by Makemedo beating him with the scroll.)

PROPHET:

No! Help! Help! Mercy!

(Exit Prophet)

MAKEMEDO:

You didn't predict that, did you? Right then, back to the meat.

(Enter Meton.)

Oh bloody hell! What now?

METON:

I have come here . . .

MAKEMEDO:

"What does this man need of me, why come here with great good speed,"

Which particular tragedy have you swanned in from?

METON:

I have come to survey your skies, measure the air-space, and calculate subdivided areas for suitable habitation.

995

993: Meton was a famous Athenian astronomer and mathematician said to have calculated a new lunar calendar. He became involved in scandal involving his attempts to exempt his family from military service (***Stage Direction: Enter Meton**).

994: The Greek has "Why have you traveled this high-booted road?" a reference to the *cothoroi*, the soft high boots worn by tragic actors (*994 **Cothoroi**).

MAKEMEDO:

By all the gods! Who is this numbskull?

METON:

I am Meton, Greek astronomer, surely you know of my sundial at
Colonus?

MAKEMEDO:

And what's all that stuff you're carrying?

(Meton starts to measure with his instruments.)

METON:

Ah, finely calibrated instruments for the precise measurement of
thin air.

For the air in its entirety is not that dissimilar to a baking dish—a
crock pot . . .

MAKEMEDO:

More like a crackpot!

METON:

I can simply calculate the trigonometrical divergence of the
topographical
plain here, reaching a tangential alignment here. You follow?

MAKEMEDO:

No, I do not!

METON:

It's really quite simple. Now, I envisage, a radial hiatus
for Clouducuckooland, an orbicular design that becomes a square,

1001: The Greek has "baking cover." This was a terra cotta bowl-shaped cover used in the oven to bake bread.

1003: These may have been a large protractor, or a right-angled rule and a huge pair of compasses.

1005: Many fifth-century philosophers such as Anaxagoras, Antiphon, and Hippocrates sought a geometric solution to the problem of constructing a square equal in area to a particular circle.

with circuiting streets surrounding the circumference, and hemispheric centers here, here and here, culminating in ellipsoid curvatures, converging on convex coronas of cyclic, convoluted coils!

MAKEMEDO:

This one's a real Thales!

1010

(Meton continues to measure.)

Hey, Meton, hey!

METON:

What is it now!

MAKEMEDO:

I'm going doing to do you a very big favor because I like you, Meton. If you'll take my advice, you'll be on your way as quick as you can.

METON:

Why, whatever for? Is it dangerous here?

1015

MAKEMEDO:

Well, it's not unlike Sparta, you know. They don't like foreigners very much, and, well, there's been a serious outbreak of unprovoked beatings all over the place.

METON:

You mean there's been some civil disorder?

1009: Most ancient town planners used a rectangular grid system. The circular design proposed by Meton seems to be purely fanciful and designed to be a ridiculous parody of contemporary civil engineering practices.

1010: A philosopher from Asia Minor who lived in the early sixth century. He was widely regarded as the father of physical science and admired as one of the seven sages.

1016: Sparta would sporadically expel any foreigners living within their territory (*1016 Spartan expulsions).

MAKEMEDO:

No, by Zeus, not at all.

METON:

Then what is it?

MAKEMEDO:

Well, it's like this; just like you, we've got quite a lot of "rules" ourselves.

One of them says that any fraudster found within the city can be publicly beaten.

(Meton quickly gathers up his instruments.)

METON:

Eh, yes, well I had better be on my way.

MAKEMEDO:

I think your meters just run out, mate! Here's the measure of my city.

(He beats Meton with one of his rulers.)

1020

Calibrate that, you cheating bastard!

(Meton flees pursued by Makemedo.)

METON:

Help! Help!

(Exit Meton. Enter the Inspector, dressed in elaborate Persian robes and strutting with great authority. He is carrying a pair of voting urns.)

INSPECTOR:

Where will I find the consuls?

1022: Inspectors were appointed to report on the allied states, regulating tribute payments and implementing legislation (***Stage Direction: Inspectors**). The Athenian *proxenoi* were consuls or envoys who lived in an allied city and represented the interests of Athens. They were an important element in the Athenian domination over their allied states.

MAKEMEDO:

Who's this Sardanapallos?

INSPECTOR:

By the powers vested in me, I hereby announce my election as external inspector of Clouduckooland.

MAKEMEDO:

An inspector! By whose authority?

INSPECTOR:

This illegible Athenian decree makes it so.

1025

MAKEMEDO:

That's not worth the paper it's written on. I tell you what, let's talk turkey:

I'll make a deal with you. I will give you a nice big bribe if you flutter off home.

INSPECTOR:

A marvelous suggestion. In fact, my presence is sorely needed back in Athens, there are some delicate Persian negotiations I have been assigned to take care of.

MAKEMEDO:

Really? Then I'll pay you off right away so you can get on—a nice back-hander.

(He slaps the Inspector.)

1023: This was the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal (668–c.627), derided by the Greeks for his lavish tastes and extreme Oriental effeminacy.

1025: The Greek has "This wretched paper from Teleas" (for Teleas, see note on line 170).

1028: The Greek has "negotiations with Pharnaces," who was the Persian *satrap* (client king) of Dascyleion in northwestern Asia Minor and an ally of the Spartans.

INSPECTOR:

1030 How dare you! I'm an Inspector, what's the meaning of this?

(He slaps him again, and the Inspector flees)

MAKEMEDO:

It's a slap in the face of democracy!
Now get out of here and take those damned
voting urns with you!

(Exit Inspector.)

The nerve of it! Sending city inspectors before there's even a city to
inspect!

(Enter the Lawyer carrying scrolls.)

LAWYER:

1035 Article five, section seven, to wit: "Any resident of Cloudcuckooland
found guilty of assault and battery on any full Athenian citizen
will . . ."

MAKEMEDO:

Not another blasted bureaucrat with a book!

LAWYER:

Sir, I am an interpreter of decrees, a seller of statutes, a peddler of
process,
in short, a lawyer at your service, and I have some nice new laws
for you.

MAKEMEDO:

For example?

LAWYER:

1040 According to Athenian directive thirty seven b, subsection four g:
All coinage,

1035: This is a "Decree-Seller," who peddles copies of state decrees to the litigious Athenian citizens.

weights, and measures of Cloudcuckooland must hereby be brought
into accordance
with the coinage, weights, and measures of Olophyxia.

MAKEMEDO:

You're the only "oily fixture" 'round here, mate.

(Makemedo attacks him.)

Sod off back to Athens and find some ambulances to chase!
The last thing I need is a lawyer. All barristers are banned!

1045

(Exit Lawyer. Reenter Inspector.)

INSPECTOR:

I hereby summon Makemedo to appear in court on a charge of
assault against . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Ye gods! You're not back again, are you? Get out of it!

(He beats the Inspector away. Exit Inspector. Reenter Lawyer.)

LAWYER:

I'll take the case! According to article five of the Athenian Criminal
Code,
any person who seeks to impede, delay or otherwise distract an
official of
the Athenian govern . . .

1050

MAKEMEDO:

Not again! If I've told you once . . .

(He beats the Lawyer away. Exit Lawyer. Reenter Inspector.)

1042: A small town in Thrace and an Athenian tribute-paying ally that
changed sides to Sparta for a short time in 424–23 B.C.E.

1043: The pun in the Greek is on *Olophuxioi/Ototuxioi*, from *ototoi* meaning
"to cry in pain."

INSPECTOR:

I'll see you punished, and what's more I'm suing you for two thousand drachmas!

MAKEMEDO:

Right! That's it! I'm going to smash those damned voting urns of yours.

(He attacks the Inspector as he exits. Reenter Lawyer.)

LAWYER:

I know all about you and your offenses against the state. You were seen out one night pissing on an Athenian decree tablet! I'll report you!*

MAKEMEDO:

1055 It's time you were permanently disbarred!

(He beats the Lawyer away. Exit Lawyer.)

I've had enough of this. I'm going to take this goat indoors. I'll just have to finish the sacrifice off inside.

(Exit Makemedo through the doors.)

[Second Parabasis]

CHORUS:

*Now all you mortals must sacrifice
To this omnipotent bird-paradise.
1060 To feathered sentinels say your prayer.
We watch your world, we're everywhere.
We'll maximize your bounteous crop,
We'll kill the pests, the blights will stop.
On those seed devourers of voracious jaw
1065 From pod to sod we will declare war.
The ravenous maggots that ruin your fruits,
Destroyers of gardens, flowers, and roots,
All agricultural blights we'll put to flight,
Against horticultural enemies we will fight.
1070 All creeping creatures and crawling things
Will be annihilated beneath our wings.*

On this day we publicly denounce our enemies and repeat the state declaration:

“For the killing of Diagoras the Melian heretic,
a reward of one talent. For the death of a tyrant,
even though they are in fact already dead, one talent.” 1075

In addition we wish to make our own declaration:

“For the Killing of Philocrates the Bird-Seller, one talent,
if captured alive, four talents.” This criminal is known
to string chaffinches up in bundles and sell them, seven 1080
for an obol. He blows up his thrushes for display,
and he tortures blackbirds by shoving their own feathers
up their noses. Not only that, he imprisons poor pigeons,
crams them into nets, and makes them lure other birds into his
clutches.

Any of you who might keep birds caged up in your houses,
we hereby order their immediate release. Anyone who fails 1085
to do so will be rounded up by the birds and arrested.
Then we’ll see how you like being kept in cages and used as decoys.

*Most blessed birds, blissful breed,
What splendid airborne lives we lead.
Come wintertime and we need no cloak, 1090
And we’re cool in summer while others roast.
In the rustling leaves we make our home,
In the meadows’ blossoming buds we roam
While the cicada sings her heavenly tune,
Beneath sun-filled skies in the heat of noon. 1095
We spend our winters snug in rocky caves,
With mountain nymphs we share our days.*

1072: State proclamations and public announcements were made between shows at the festival of Dionysus.

1073: Diagoras was a lyric poet from Melos charged with ridiculing the mysteries. He escaped to Pellene, an anti-Athenian city in the north of the Peloponnese. The Athenians issued a warrant for his death or arrest, which is repeated here.

1074: It seems that there was a tradition of publicly denouncing the Tyrants, even though Hippias, the last of the Athenian Tyrants, had been expelled in 510 B.C.E.

1077: For Philocrates see note on line 14.

*When warmth returns with spring's first shoots,
 We bask in sunshine and feast on fruits.
 1100 Virgin myrtle berries feel our first bite,
 In the garden of Graces, to our delight.*

We would like to take this opportunity to say a few words to the judges

of this dramatic competition. We want you to know all the wonderful presents you will receive from us, if you are wise enough to award this play

1105 first prize. Wonderful gifts far greater than anything Paris was offered.

Firstly, you will receive what every judge yearns for the most, namely, owls.

We promise that Laurium owls will come to your home to roost, they'll nest

right in your purses and hatch out lots of brand, spanking new, small change.

We will crown your houses with eagle-roofs, it will be like living in a temple,

1110 and if you are allotted a public office and fancy taking a peck at the petty cash

now and then, we'll give you a sharp talon to help you rake in all that money.

Finally, when you go out for a nice dinner, we'll give you the mouth of a pelican!

However, if you should decide not to cast your vote our way, then beware!

We would advise you to carry an umbrella at all times, like the metal parasols

1115 they put on the statues, for next time you are out and about, strolling along

1105: Paris was offered tantalizing gifts by Athena, Hera, and Aphrodite to name her the fairest goddess. He chose Aphrodite, who promised the most beautiful woman. His subsequent abduction of Helen caused the Trojan War.

1107: Laurium, in northeastern Attica, was the location of the Athenian silver mines. For owls on Athenian coins see note on line 302.

1109: The triangular pediments of Greek temples were called *aietoi* (eagles).

in your finest white gown, the birds will shit on you from a very great height!

(Enter Makemedo from the doors.)

MAKEMEDO:

My feathered friends, I am happy to tell you the omens are very good (*burp*).

That's strange, the messenger should be back from the walls by now. 1120
Aha! Here's someone now, wheezing like an Olympic runner!

(Enter a bird-messenger. panting hard.)

MESSENGER:

Whooooo, whooooo, whooooo, whooooo, whe, where is he?
Where's Prime Minister Makemedo?

MAKEMEDO:

Over here!

MESSENGER:

Whoo, whoo wonderful news! The wall, phoooo, the wall is
. . . finished!

MAKEMEDO:

Marvelous!

MESSENGER:

And what a whopper of a wall it is! Stupendous, enormous, gigantic! 1125
It is so wide you could yoke two teams of huge, titanic Trojan horses
to a pair of chariots, put Proxenides in one and Theogenes
in the other, and send them thundering along the top of the wall

1123: The Greek has "Archon," the chief magistrate of a Greek state. This is the first official title given to Makemedo, although the birds themselves do hand him decision making authority at lines 636–37.

1127: Both men were known to be excessive boasters (for Theogenes see line 821).

from different directions, *and* they would still easily miss each other.

MAKEMEDO:

By Heracles! That wide?

MESSENGER:

Not just wide, but tall. I measured it myself at least a hundred fathoms high!

1130

MAKEMEDO:

By Poseidon! I just can't fathom it! Who ever could have built a wall so high?

MESSENGER:

Birds! The birds built it! There were no Egyptian pyramid builders, no stonemasons or carpenters. The birds did it themselves, their own way! I couldn't believe my eyes when the work started; thousands of African cranes swooped in with boulders in their bellies and gave them to the curlews for carving. The house martins made the bricks, while river birds brought billions of beaks full of water.

1135

1140

MAKEMEDO:

Amazing! But who brought in all that clay?

MESSENGER:

Hod-carrying herons, hauled up by cranes.

MAKEMEDO:

How on earth did they shovel the clay into the hods?

1129: A similar description of the walls of Babylon is found in Herodotus (1.179.3). The walls of Cloudcuckooland could also allude to the long walls of Athens, between the city and harbor built by Pericles. Thucydides describes the width of these walls as having, "room for two wagons to pass each other" (1.93.5).

1130: Approximately six hundred feet.

1138: The Greeks believed that cranes swallowed stones to provide them with ballast during flight.

MESSENGER:

That was the most astounding thing, the geese shoveled
it into the heron's hods using their wonderful webbed feet.

1145

MAKEMEDO:

Now that's what I call a "feet" of engineering!

MESSENGER:

You should have seen the ducks in their little aprons
laying the bricks, and the swallows flitting about
carrying the plaster rendering in their beaks
and using their tails as trowels.

1150

MAKEMEDO:

It's the birdustrial revolution! Manpower is obsolete!
But who did the wood finishing on the walls?

MESSENGER:

Woodpeckers drove in the nails,
and the woodcocks chiseled the timber,
it sounded like a great shipyard!
Now the walls have great gates and huge bolts,
the wall is manned, the sentries have been posted,
the watchbirds have been given their bells,
and the torch fires on the towers are all burning.
Do you think I can go and have a bath now and get some sleep?
We've done our part, it's up to you now.

1155

1160

(Exit Messenger offstage. Makemedo is struck dumb.)

CHORUS:

What's wrong? Are you surprised that the wall's finished already?

1165

MAKEMEDO:

Mmm, it is absolutely amazing!
It sounds like a "tall" story to me.

(Makemedo sees a bird-guard approaching.)

Hey! look over there, here comes a guard with a message,

Looks like he's performing the war dance!

GUARD:

1170 Oo, oo, oo, oo, oo, oo!

MAKEMEDO:

Whatever is the matter?

GUARD:

It's terrible! There's been a violation of our airspace!
One of the gods has just breezed in through the gates
right under the beaks of the ravens on guard duty.

MAKEMEDO:

"Such fearful, desperate acts we must endure."
Which god was it?

GUARD:

1175 We couldn't tell, it was moving too fast. I'll tell you this much,
he, she, or it was wearing a lovely set of wings.

MAKEMEDO:

Alert the skirmish squadrons!

GUARD:

1180 We've already sent up everything we have,
a whole flight of kittyhawks, an air corps
of cormorants, and our entire tactical
talon group comprising every bird of prey
we could muster, kestrels, vultures, eagles,
buzzards, you name it! The whole sky's a whirl
of rushing wings whistling through the air.
That god must be closing in somewhere nearby!

(Exit Guard offstage.)

1169: The *purrikê* was a dance performed in full *hoplite* (infantry) armor
(*1169 War dance).

MAKEMEDO:

Then this god is going to suffer the slings and arrows
of my outrageous fortune! Call out the guard!
Bring me a sling! A catapult! Anything!

1185

CHORUS:

Prepare for battle, this is War!
Defend the skies that Erebus bore.
Bird 'gainst god for this cloudy home.
Let none pass through our no-fly zone.

1190

1195

Keep watch! Look everywhere!
I can hear the sound of whirling wings.
That air-borne god is right around here somewhere!

*(Enter Iris the rainbow goddess, "flying" on the stage crane.
Makemedo has been chasing Iris around the stage and is now out
of breath.)**

MAKEMEDO:

Hey You! Whe . . . whe . . . where do you think you're flying?
Heave to! Hold fast!

*(Makemedo tries in vain to bring Iris to a halt as she swings across
the stage.)*

Stop fluttering about all over the place! Stop! Halt! Keep still, will
you!

1200

(Iris finally come to rest, suspended over the stage.)

Right! State your name, purpose of visit, and country of residence.

IRIS:

I have come from the gods on Olympus.

MAKEMEDO:

State your name! Are you a boat or a bitch?

1190: For Erebus see note on line 692.

IRIS:

I am Iris the fast.

MAKEMEDO:

I'll bet you are, my dear. The *Paralus* or the *Salaminia*?

IRIS:

1205 What is the meaning of this?

MAKEMEDO:

It's a forced entry! Buzzards stand by to board!

IRIS:

I'd like to see you try! How dare you!

MAKEMEDO:

I'll impound you!

IRIS:

This is outrageous. I protest!

MAKEMEDO:

So my little bitch, how did you get through? By what passage?

IRIS:

1210 Why would I need any sort of "passage"?

MAKEMEDO:

I see, you're going to be like that, are you?

Did you report to the jackdaw at immigration control?

Did you get your passport stamped by the cock?

IRIS:

I beg your pardon!

1203: Iris was the rainbow goddess and a messenger of the gods Her Homeric epithet was "swift Iris" (*Iliad* 8.399).

1204: The two fastest Athenian triremes (see note on line 148).

1210: The Greek has *pulos* ("gate"), a euphemism for the vagina. This was doubly offensive because Iris was a virgin goddess.

MAKEMEDO:

So you haven't been properly handled yet?

IRIS:

Are you quite mad?

MAKEMEDO:

Did the stork enter you correctly?

1215

IRIS:

You can be quite certain that nobody has entered me!

MAKEMEDO:

Don't try any of that funny stuff with me, "Wonder Wings,"
you're flying over our airspace without authorization.

IRIS:

Authorization! The gods don't need authorization.

MAKEMEDO:

They do here, by Zeus! You have entered the country illegally,
you are committing a crime just by being here.
You may well say that we're chasing rainbows,
but the law is the law and the sentence is death!

1220

IRIS:

But I'm an immortal, I can't die.

MAKEMEDO:

Don't you go splitting hairs, with me, my dear.
The sentence stands, you'll be put to death.
We can't let you gods just do as you please,
you have to obey the laws too, just like
everybody else. We're in charge now!
Tell me, "Where are you sailing on the breeze?"

1225

IRIS:

I am bearing an important message for mankind from father Zeus:
"Slay your livestock for Zeus the savior,
fill the skies with smoky savor.
Roast the meat, baste and slice,

1230

it's time you mortals sacrificed."

MAKEMEDO:

And to which gods are the humans supposed to make these sacrifices?

IRIS:

To the gods on Olympus, of course!

MAKEMEDO:

1235 I don't think so.

IRIS:

Well, what other gods are there, then?

MAKEMEDO:

Haven't you heard? The birds are the gods of mankind now,
It's the birds that get the sacrifices, not the gods, by god!

IRIS:

1240 You fool, you fool! Test not the mettle
of the dread gods for your people will be crushed
by the hand of Zeus, overthrown by Justice and smitten
in the smoky fire, consigning you to the flames
and incinerating your house with his thunderous bolts!

MAKEMEDO:

1245 Madam, I would greatly appreciate it if you
would be kind enough to stop spitting
and spluttering all over me and shut your blasted mouth!
I'm not some quivering Lydian or Phrygian,
and all this talk of smiting does nothing for me.
If Zeus gives me the slightest little bit of trouble
I'll incinerate his place like "the halls of Amphion"

1246: Both areas of the Near East. The Greeks regarded men from the East as cowardly, superstitious, and effeminate.

1249: A quote from Aeschylus' *Niobe* (Fr. 100). Amphion was the husband of Niobe. His house was ravaged by the deaths of his children at the hands of Apollo and Artemis.

with my fire-brandishing eagles. Then I'll send porphorion
 birds on up to heaven, and you know the terrible
 trouble he had with Porphyrion the Titan, well I've got
 six hundred of them here, complete with leopard skins!
 You had better do as I say, my girl, or there'll be trouble!
 I may be getting on a bit, but I can still sail at ramming speed. 1255
 I'll find your sea-legs, splice your mainbrace, and shiver your
 timbers!

IRIS:

I have never heard such filthy, disgusting language in all . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Flutter off, "rent-a-rainbow!" Shoo! Shoo!

IRIS:

Just you wait until my father hears about this! You'll be sorry!

MAKEMEDO:

He won't say "boo" to a goose!

Go and fire up some younger fellow! 1260

(Exit Iris.)

CHORUS:

To Gods and Zeus we've closed the gate,

No more will they fly through this state. 1265

The smoky offerings men send on high

Will never get through bird-held sky.

MAKEMEDO:

I fear the worst! Where's the messenger

who went down to the humans, is he never to return? 1270

(Enter Messenger 2.)

1253: Porphyrion was the legendary king of the giants who fought against Zeus and the gods, and also the name of a species of the Purple Gallinule (see note on line 553).

MESSENGER 2:

O Lord Makemedo! O Excellency! O Great Sage!
 O wise one, O celebrated one, O suave one,
 O blessed one, O smooth one, O somebody stop me!*

MAKEMEDO:

What do you want?

(The Messenger offers Makemedo a golden crown.)

MESSENGER 2:

Here, take this, it is yours, the golden crown of public opinion
 from your adoring populace in honor of your wisdom.

(The Messenger crowns Makemedo.)

MAKEMEDO:

I accept this crown. But why have the humans given me this?

MESSENGER:

Oh, most wondrous founder of this skyborne city,
 your modesty astounds me, that you could even ask
 such a question! The humans have gone cuckoo
 for Cloudcuckooland! Sir, you are the toast of all mankind.
 I mean, what were they before, before you showed them the way,
 they were Laconizers! Sparta freaks! Hungry, hairy, hoary
 and humming, just like Socrates, going around with Spartan sticks.
 But now it's different, they've gone absolutely bird-crazy,
 birds are all the rage, and they are emulating every aspect of bird life.
 You should see them, dawn breaks and they break into birdsong:
 "up with the lark!"—"the early bird catches the worm!"
 Then they all fly their coops and flock together amid the papyrus

1283: Socrates was often depicted as having a "Spartan" lifestyle. He was known for depriving himself of food and for being unhygienic (see *Clouds* lines 175 and 441–42). Both he and some of his pupils were also said to have admired the Spartan system (Plato *Critias* 52e). The Spartan stick was a type of gnarled walking stick or club preferred by the Spartans. In *Lysistrata* it has distinct phallic associations (991).

sharpening their bills, pecking at laws and perching by the statutes.
 Those who have gone really feather-brained are even changing their
 names,
 that one-legged shopkeeper calls himself "Flamingo" now.
 Menippus, the horse-breeder, is "Swift." Opuntius the informer,
 "Stool Pigeon." Philocles the poet, you know, Aeschylus' nephew,
 is now called "Lesser Spotted Warbler." Theogenes is "Little
 Bustard,"
 Lycurgus "Ibis," and Chaerephon the philosopher is "Batty."
 Syracosius the politician is now known as "Crow" as he sounds
 like one,
 and Medias, whom you could knock down with a feather, is
 "Sitting Duck."
 And you should hear the music that they are all listening to these
 days,
 every new song teems with birds: nightingales, bluebirds, doves,
 eagles.
 No one can turn out a tune these days without a feather floating
 about
 or something taking wing or wanting to be as free as a bird.
 Prepare yourselves for the mass migrations,
 there are going to be thousands of humans making

1290

1295

1300

1289: Athenian legislation was carved onto large decree stones, then copied onto papyri and sold (see *1054 Decree tablets).

1292: Menippus may have been an Athenian politician, but the scholia mention a connection with horse-breeding. For Opuntius see note on line 154.

1293: For Philocles, see note on line 282.

1294: For Theogenes, see note on 822.

1295: The grandfather of the fourth-century statesman of the same name. This old Athenian family may have had Egyptian roots; hence "Ibis," a bird closely associated with Egypt. Chaerephon was a colleague of Socrates and often lampooned for his unhealthy demeanor and pallid skin. He appears as a witness in *Wasps* (line 1409) and is mentioned throughout *Clouds*.

1296: A politician who had a piercingly loud speaking voice and in the Greek is named "Jay."

1297: A minor politician known for his love of gambling. For "Sitting Duck" the Greek has "Quail," after a cruel game played in Athens where two quails were placed on a board and struck on the head until one of them flinched and lost.

their way up here to earn their wings, and they'll be wanting
 1305 beaks and talons too. You had better find some wings
 from somewhere to give to all your new immigrants.

(Exit Messenger.)

MAKEMEDO:

Wings! Wings! We need wings and lots of them!

(To Manes the servant)

Come on! This is no time for standing around!
 Get inside and fill up all the baskets you can find with wings!
 1310 Tell Manes to bring them out here and give them to me.
 I must prepare to receive our new colonists.

(Manes walks inside.)

CHORUS:

*Now the humans are on their way,
 Migrant streams, strong and steady.
 To settle among us come what may . . .*

(As Manes brings out a very small basket)

MAKEMEDO:

1315 By god, I hope we're ready!

CHORUS:

This blessed place, this city dear . . .

(As Manes slowly goes back inside)

MAKEMEDO:

I wish he'd hurry with that gear!

CHORUS:

*This wondrous city of gentility,
 Full of wisdom, love, and grace,
 1320 Happiness, peace, tranquillity . . .*

(To Manes)

MAKEMEDO:

Move! Or I'll punch you in the face!

CHORUS:

*Now is the time to bring out the wings,
this opportunity must not pass.
It is up to you to do these things . . .*

1325

MAKEMEDO:

I'll kick him up the arse!

(Manes continues to bring out the baskets very slowly.)

CHORUS:

Your slave moves slowly like a mule . . .

(Shouting to Manes)

MAKEMEDO:

Get a move on, you lazy fool!

CHORUS:

*You must choose the wings we see.
Inspect each human and take your pick,
For music, sea-travel, or prophecy . . .*

1330

MAKEMEDO:

I'll beat this shirker with my stick!

1335

(Enter Youth, singing.)

YOUTH:

*If only like an Eagle I could soar
High above the swelling untamed sea
Where breakers crash and waves roar,
If only an Eagle in flight I could be."*

MAKEMEDO:

Looks like that messenger was right, here's someone singing
about eagles.

1340

1339: This may well be a quotation from Sophocles' tragedy, *Oenomaus* (fr. 476).

YOUTH:

I want to fly like a bird in the sky!

MAKEMEDO:

He'll be wanting a set of wings no doubt.

YOUTH:

Wings, I want wings! I'm for the birds!

1345 I want to emigrate, I like the sound of your laws.

MAKEMEDO:

Which particular laws do you mean, the birds have quite a few?

YOUTH:

You follow the law of nature up here, right?

I mean, it's customary to peck your father and wing his neck.

MAKEMEDO:

Well yes, we do recognize that it's perfectly natural
1350 for a youngling to take a potshot at the old cock.

YOUTH:

Right! That's exactly why I want to live here. I want to strangle
my father and inherit everything he owns!

MAKEMEDO:

I see. But we do have a law that is set down on the sacred
Stork Tablets that states:

"When the young of birds fly the nest
1355 and wing it through the air,
they must swear to do their best
to give their parents care."

YOUTH:

No way! I'm not caring for my old dad when he's past it!
I've wasted my time coming all the way up here!

1353: A comic adaptation of the old codes of the early Athenian statesmen, Solon and Dracon, which were written on wooden blocks and set up on the Stoa Basileius in the Agora in Athens.

MAKEMEDO:

No, not at all. Listen I can tell you've got a heart of gold really. 1360
 You've just been led astray, negative influences, a bad childhood.
 You're just like a poor orphan chick. I've got just the thing for you,
 forget about your dad. If you really want to beat someone up,
 here, take this nice wing . . .

(Makemedo hands him a shield.)

. . . and put this talon in your other hand. 1365

(He hands him a sword.)

Imagine that this is a nice cockscomb . . .

(He puts a crested helmet on the Youth's head.)

There you are,
 Right! You little bastard, you're in the Army now!*
 Stand up straight! Stomach in! Chest out!
 There's plenty of fighting in Thrace I hear. I'm shipping you there.
 Attention! About turn! Quick march! Left right, left right, left
 right!

(The Youth double-marches offstage.)

YOUTH:

You're right, by Dionysus. It's a life in the infantry for me! 1370

MAKEMEDO:

Off you go!

(Exit Youth. Enter Cinesias the poet, singing and dancing.)

CINESIAS:

*Away, away, soaring on the wing to Olympian heights
 My melody flitter flutters on its way, here, there, everywhere.*

1368: In the spring of 414, a force was being assembled for operations in Thrace, the region to the north of Greece (*1396 Thrace).

1373: A dithyrambic poet and a contemporary of Aristophanes. Dithyrambs were choral songs accompanied by the aulos, and their performance was an integral part of the festival of Dionysus (*Stage Direction: Enter Cinesias).

MAKEMEDO:

1375 We're going to need a shipload of wings to elevate this bloke's poetry!

CINESIAS:

My spirit steeled, my body in motion, seeking elusive flight . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Why it's Cinesias, the "talking twig"! Why have you come circling your way up here with your peglegged poetry!

CINESIAS:

1380 *Oh, to be a bird in the sky and sing like the nightingale fair.*

MAKEMEDO:

Will you stop singing that awful row! Just *tell* me what you want.

CINESIAS:

1385 Oh, for a pair of wings! I want to fly, high in the sky,
then I can swoop up, up, up, and touch the lofty clouds,
and there I'll find the soaring, ethereal, snow-pure verses!

MAKEMEDO:

You mean to tell me that you get verses from the clouds?

CINESIAS:

1390 Of course! The entire art-form is inspired by them.
The most dazzling dithyrambs are vaporous, vacuous,
elusive, misty, wind-wafted, hazy fluff!
You'll know when you hear some. Ahem!

(Cinesias prepares to sing.)

MAKEMEDO:

No, really, I won't!

CINESIAS:

But, by Heracles, you will! Just let me whip through a cycle of some of my airs for you.

(He starts to sing and dance.)

*Wafting gently upon the sweeping breeze
Bird-like clouds sailing through the sky . . .*

(Makemedo tries in vain to stop him.)

MAKEMEDO:

Easy oar there, matey!

1395

CINESIAS:

*Floating up, blown with breathless ease,
Sped by the wind, the air moves briskly by.*

(Makemedo takes a pair of wings from the basket.)

MAKEMEDO:

By Zeus, I've had enough of this!
I'm going to knock the wind out of your sails!

(Makemedo chases him stage left.)

CINESIAS:

Hither I go sped on toward the south,

(Cinesias evades him and runs stage right.)

Now thither to the icy north thus I clip,

(Makemedo chases him back to center stage.)

Cleaving sky furrows to the harbor mouth . . .

1400

MAKEMEDO:

I'll "waft these wings" and your arse I'll whip!

(Makemedo beats him with the wings.)

CINESIAS:

I can't believe that you would dare to treat me like this.
I am a highly respected choral director of dithyrambic odes!

MAKEMEDO:

Oh, in that case, you can stay up here with us and train

1405

a gaggle of geese or chorus of crows for Leotrophides.

CINESIAS:

Are you trying to make a fool out of me? I tell you this, sir,
I shall not tire in my quest for wings!
I *will* have wings and soar to the heights of poetry!

(Exit Cinesias. Enter the Informer wearing a tattered cloak.)

INFORMER:

1410 *"Whoever can these speckled birds be
That have no debts nor property?
Oh Swallow, Swallow, of you I sing."*

MAKEMEDO:

Another bloody immigrant! There goes the neighborhood.

INFORMER:

1415 *"Oh Swallow, Swallow, of you I sing . . ."*

MAKEMEDO:

Judging by the state of his cloak, he should remember:
"One swallow does not make a spring."

INFORMER:

Is this the place where I can get my wings?

MAKEMEDO:

It is. What do you want?

INFORMER:

1420 *"Wings! I must have wings!"*

1406: The Greek has "Train a chorus here, for Leotrophides." Leotrophides was a remarkably thin Athenian politician and so the perfect producer for the skinny Cinesias.

1410: The Informer is a sycophant, an individual who sought to profit by collecting information and bringing charges against other parties.

1412: Adapted from a poem by Alcaeus (Fr. 435).

1420: Taken from Aeschylus' *Myrmidons* (Fr. 140): "*Weapons! I must have weapons!*"

MAKEMEDO:

So you can fly off to your tailor and get a new cloak, I suppose.

INFORMER:

No. I'm a professional bailiff to the island states, a sycophant, specializing in false testimony, perjury, trumped up charges, and general shit-stirring.

MAKEMEDO:

It's nice to see a man happy in his work.

INFORMER:

I have a particular penchant for provoking lawsuits. That's where the wings would help, I could easily swoop down on all the allies and deliver my writs.

1425

MAKEMEDO:

Greek island hopping! So a set of wings would increase your efficiency!

INFORMER:

That's impossible! But they would help me give pirates the slip, and I could fly about unnoticed with the storks delivering newborns, newborn writs and summonses of course!*

MAKEMEDO:

So that's the sum total of your life, is it? A nice young lad like you, going around accusing poor foreigners.

1430

INFORMER:

It's a living. I'm not good at manual labor.

MAKEMEDO:

By Zeus! I can't believe that a big strapping young lad like you

1421: The Greek has "fly off to Pellana," a city in northern Peloponnese where a heavy woolen cloak was awarded as first prize in the chariot race at the local Hermaea festival.

1435 can't find good honest gainful employment and instead
has to sully himself peddling perjury and serving summonses.

INFORMER:

Look, I came for a set of wings, not free advice.

MAKEMEDO:

But I am giving you wings, with my words!

INFORMER:

What? How can you get wings from words?

MAKEMEDO:

Everyone knows that "words are wings."

INFORMER:

Everyone?

MAKEMEDO:

1440 Listen, I'll give you an example of what I mean.
You've heard the old men sitting around playing checkers
and hanging around the barbers, "That fly-by-night Dieitrephes
and his feather-brained advice, my lad's flown off to ride horses."
Or, "My boy can't keep his feet on the ground either, his head's in
the clouds,
1445 and he's decided to become a tragic poet. What a flight of fancy!"

INFORMER:

So you're saying words make wings?

MAKEMEDO:

Right! Words heighten the mind; they let the spirit soar.
Words are morally uplifting, raising standards leading
to the pursuit of higher things. Words of wisdom can wing
1450 you on to a more elevated occupation.

INFORMER:

Sorry, it won't work with me.

1442: For Dieitrephes see note on line 800.

MAKEMEDO:

Why ever not?

INFORMER:

I couldn't disgrace the family name. I come from a long line of despised sycophants and reviled informers.

Come on, let me have a nice fast pair of wings, the hawk variety, or the falcon, I'm not fussed. Then I can swoop down to the islands, deliver a few summonses, whiz back to Athens to get my convictions,

1455

then fly off to the islands again . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Oh I see, you plan to have these foreigners tried and convicted before

they even have a chance to get to the court and make an appearance.

INFORMER:

You've got it.

MAKEMEDO:

And while they're on their way to Athens, you'll be flying back to the islands to confiscate all their property.

1460

INFORMER:

That's right! I'll be hurtling back and forth like a spinning top.*

MAKEMEDO:

Like a spinning top, really? It's not wings you need, but a good horse . . .

1465

(Makemedo produces a large whip.)

A good horsewhipping!*

INFORMER:

Zeus! He's going to flog me!

1456: Many allied states had their cases heard in Athenian courts, and defendants were forced to travel to Athens.

(Makemedo lashes him with a whip as he darts back and forth.)

MAKEMEDO:

Look, you're "flying" now! Your wings need clipping,
you sycophantic sod!

*(Makemedo chases the Informer as he weaves across the stage
trying to avoid the lash.)*

INFORMER:

Help! Help!

MAKEMEDO:

I'll make you go back and forth like a top!
You'll be whizzing all right, free-falling back to earth,
head first! Happy landings!

(Makemedo whips him off the stage. Exit Informer.)

(To the servants) Come on! let's take these wings back inside.

(Exit Makemedo and servants through the door.)

CHORUS:

1470 *We've winged it over some wondrous sights,
And swooped far and wide across the sea,
Yet the strangest encounter of all those flights,
Was to spy the rare Cleonymus tree.*

1475 *Its heart of oak sits on a foreign plot,
Though its boughs spread far and wide,
It produces such a worthless crop,
Yet has reached enormous size.*

1480 *It blossoms each and every spring,
Courthouse writs are the fruit it yields.
Come autumn it does a very strange thing,
Turns yellow and scatters shedding shields.*

1474: For Cleonymus, see note on line 289.

*There is a land of no sunshine,
Where darkness smothers every light,
A dismal hinterland of sunless grime,
Where Heroes dwell in the realm of night.*

1485

*Yet there was once a golden time,
Before the murky night came down,
When Man and Hero together dined,
And it was safe to walk out of town.*

1490

*Now if Orestes a man should meet,
While partaking of the nighttime air,
He'll be assaulted right on the street,
Knocked out cold and stripped quite bare!*

(Enter Prometheus from offstage in disguise.)

PROMETHEUS:

Gently does it. I hope Zeus doesn't see me.
Psst. Where can I find Makemedo?

1495

*(Enter Makemedo from the doors, wearing a nightshirt and
carrying a chamber pot.)*

MAKEMEDO:

What on earth is this? A walking blanket?

PROMETHEUS:

Shhhh! Am I being followed, can you see any gods around?

MAKEMEDO:

No, by Zeus, who in god's name are you anyway?

PROMETHEUS:

Not so loud! What time is it?

1491: For Orestes the clothes thief, see note on line 713.

1494: A Titan who disobeyed Zeus and gave mankind the secret of fire
(*Stage Direction: Enter Prometheus).

MAKEMEDO:

1500 The time? It's the afternoon. Who are you?

PROMETHEUS:

Is it getting dark yet? How close are we to nightfall?

MAKEMEDO:

You're starting to really piss me off now, mate!

PROMETHEUS:

What's Zeus doing with the weather? Is it clear and sunny,
or cloudy with low visibility? What do you see?

MAKEMEDO:

I can tell you that you'll be seeing stars in a minute!

(Makemedo raises his fist to hit him).

PROMETHEUS:

Oh good, it must be dark already. I'll remove my disguise.

MAKEMEDO:

Why, it's "Our Dear Prometheus"!*

PROMETHEUS:

Shhh! Keep quiet!

MAKEMEDO:

1505 Why?

PROMETHEUS:

Shhh, don't say my name out loud!

If Zeus sees me here, I'm in big trouble.

I've come to let you know how things are up above.

(Prometheus puts up an umbrella.)

Quick, hold this parasol over me.

1509: The parasol may have been a parody of a similar item used in ritual processions (*1508 Parasol).

(He hands it to Makemedo.)

Now the gods won't see me talking to you.

MAKEMEDO:

That's a good idea, how very Promethean,
quick, nip under the shade. What's the word?

1510

(Prometheus and Makemedo huddle under the umbrella.)

PROMETHEUS:

Listen then.

MAKEMEDO:

I'm listening, go on.

PROMETHEUS:

Zeus has had it.

MAKEMEDO:

What! Since when?

PROMETHEUS:

Since you founded Cloudcuckooland and colonized the sky.
We haven't had so much as a whiff of sacrificial smoke since then;
the offerings from earth are just not getting through.
No succulent thigh bones or tasty titbits, not a sausage!
We're famished! It's worse than the Thesmophoria fasting festival!
It's getting dangerous, those uncouth barbarian gods from the
mountains
are howling with hunger and threatening to rise up against Zeus.
He has to get the air embargo lifted and get the sacrifice shipments
flowing on up to heaven again.

1515

1520

MAKEMEDO:

You mean to tell me that there are barbarian gods in heaven, too?

1525

1520: The Thesmophoria was a three-day festival celebrated by married women in honor of Demeter and Kore. On the second day the women fasted.

PROMETHEUS:

Why yes, even barbarians need something to pray to.
How else would Execestides have a family deity?

MAKEMEDO:

And what do you call these barbarian gods?

PROMETHEUS:

They are known as Jerkoffalots.*

MAKEMEDO:

1530 Ooh! Sounds nasty, it must be very *hard* being a barbarian god.*

PROMETHEUS:

I imagine so. Listen to this, Zeus and the Jerkoffalots
have got together to try to sort it all out.
They are sending a delegation down to you to make a peace treaty.
Now, here's what you must do: flatly reject all offers*
1535 that they might make until Zeus gives his word that he will return
the scepter of power to the birds and allow you to marry the
Divine Princess.

MAKEMEDO:

Who's the Divine Princess?

PROMETHEUS:

Ah, a beautiful girl, the keeper of Zeus' thunderbolts,
and the key to it all, sound judgment, the rule of law,
1540 common sense, shipyards, political backstabbing,
the government coffers, and, of course, jury pay!

MAKEMEDO:

She holds the key to all of that?

1527: For Execestides, see note on line 11. Athenian families had their own patron ancestral gods, which further proved their qualification for citizenship and office.

1536: An invention of Aristophanes, sharing many of the same attributes as Athena. It is through marriage to this goddess that Makemedo will hold divine power (*1536 Divine Princess).

PROMETHEUS:

Yes indeed she does, and if you marry her, it will all be yours.
Well, that's my advice, you understand why I had to come and tell
you.
After all, I am Prometheus, and I have always liked you humans.

1545

MAKEMEDO:

Yes, you gave us fire, and really stoked up the coals!

PROMETHEUS:

Anyway, I hate all the gods, as you know.

MAKEMEDO:

I gather the feeling is mutual.

PROMETHEUS:

Yes, I'm a proper Timon. I must go, it's getting late.
Hand me my parasol, then if Zeus sees me, he'll think
I'm attending a basket bearer in some festival or other.

1550

MAKEMEDO:

Good idea, and while you're at it, you can be a stool bearer too!
Here, take this, will you.

*(Makemedo gives Prometheus his chamber pot. Exit Prometheus
offstage. Exit Makemedo through the doors.)*

CHORUS:

*Where the Shadefoot tribe are seen,
And men take handstand strolls,
There is a lake for all unclean,
Where Socrates saves men's souls.*

1555

1549: Timon was a mythological misanthrope who lived as a hermit.

1552: Religious processions included stool bearers and attendants holding parasols (*1552 Stool bearers). Aristophanes mocks this ceremony by making Prometheus carry out Makemedo's lavatory.

1554: A mythological people who were said to have such large feet they would walk on their hands to protect themselves from the hot sun.

*And to this place Peisander came,
His human spirit he tried to find.
He'd spent his soul pursuing fame,
Misplaced his heart and lost his mind.*

1560

*Like Odysseus he made his sacrifice,
But when the blood was spilled, he fled.
He hoped a camel would suffice,*
But batty Chaerephon was raised instead!*

*(Enter Poseidon, Heracles, and Jerkoffalot.)**

POSEIDON:

1565

So this is the city of Clouducuckooland. Onward, my fellow delegates.

(To Jerkoffalot)

Holy mackerel! What are you doing? You're all at sea!
Put your clothes on properly, at least try and look like a god!
You wear a gown like this, draped from left to right.

(Jerkoffalot attempts to rearrange his clothing.)

1570

What are you doing, you idiot! Oh the things we gods must do
in the name of democracy; it's totally demeaning. However did
you get elected! You really are a fish out of water!

(Poseidon tries to adjust Jerkoffalot's gown.)

Will you keep still!

(Jerkoffalot will not keep still.)

1556: The activities of the philosopher Socrates were frequently lampooned by Aristophanes (see *Clouds*). His concern with the psyche of man is parodied as raising dead souls from the underworld in some kind of dark rite.

1557: A leading Athenian politician who served on the commission responsible for investigating the mutilation of the Herms and prosecuting the perpetrators (*1557 **Peisander**).

1561: This choral song was inspired by the account of Odysseus' descent into the underworld in Book 11 of the *Odyssey*.

1564: For Chaerephon, see note on line 1296. Aristophanes often derides the philosopher as looking "half dead."

You are truly the most barbaric
barbarian God I have ever encountered!

(Turning to Heracles)

So, Heracles, What's the plan of action here?

HERACLES:

Listen, Poseidon, my advice is find the little mortal
who started this blockade and then throttle the bastard!

1575

POSEIDON:

Heaven help me! How many times have I got to spell it out?
We have been selected as envoys to treat for peace.

HERACLES:

I'll give him peace, a piece of my club up his . . .

POSEIDON:

Shhh! Here he comes.

*(Enter Makemedo from the doors with cooking utensils and some
dead birds. His servants bring out some jars and a brazier, which
they light.)*

MAKEMEDO:

Right then, where's the cheese grater? I need some garlic
and a nice bit of cheese. Time to turn up the heat. Lovely!

1580

POSEIDON:

Greetings, mortal! You are in the presence of three gods.

(Makemedo ignores Poseidon and continues to prepare his birds.)

MAKEMEDO:

Hang on, mate, I'm slicing garlic at the moment.

1580: Makemedo is now cooking the birds in the same way he had so strongly condemned at lines 535–38.

HERACLES:

What kind of meat are you cooking?

MAKEMEDO:

1585 Birds! Birds found guilty of insurrection against the bird democracy!

HERACLES:

Oh, so you put the garlic on before you baste?

MAKEMEDO:

Oh, hello, Heracles. What can I do for you?

POSEIDON:

As the appointed delegates of the gods, we three have been entrusted with the appropriate power to treat for peace in the matter and . . .

(Makemedo ignores Poseidon and continues to cook.)

MAKEMEDO:

Damn it! There's no olive oil left in the bottle.*

HERACLES:

1590 What a shame, you can't baste birds without a nice drop of extra virgin.

POSEIDON:

We believe that this current crisis serves neither party any useful purpose.

Furthermore, it is the opinion of Olympus that there is much you may gain

from renewed friendly and harmonious relations between us. In particular,

a full and plentiful supply of fresh cool water appropriate to all your birdbath

needs, and the pleasant and fruitful halcyon days of summer to run concurrently.

1595

Zeus has given us full authority to act on his behalf in these matters.

MAKEMEDO:

First of all, I would like to say for the record that it wasn't us who started

this conflict. But we won't dwell on that just now as we want peace, too.

We have just one condition: that our ancient bird rights be restored. Therefore, Zeus must return the scepter of authority to us, the birds. If this one small concession is agreeable to you three gentlemen, then I would be delighted if you would like to join me for a nibble.* 1600

HERACLES:

That gets my vote. Let's eat!

POSEIDON:

You fool! You are nothing but an idiot and a glutton. Would you give away your father's sovereignty so easily? 1605

MAKEMEDO:

Poseidon, you are mistaken. Can't you see that the gods will actually grow more powerful by redistributing power to the birds? Think about it. Whenever it's a bit overcast, the mortals run around under the cloud cover getting away with all kinds of sacrilege and taking your names in vain.

Now, if we were allies, we could easily solve this problem for you. Say a mortal swore an oath to "the Raven and to Zeus," and then broke his sacred vow, a raven would swoop down and scratch his eyes out! 1610

POSEIDON:

By Poseidon! That really would be giving someone the evil eye, wouldn't it?

HERACLES:

You're right there, uncle.

(To Jerkoffalot)

What do you think?

JERKOFFALOT:

Nibblenobble! 1615

1615: Probably this phrase was deliberately delivered as unintelligible non-sense.

HERACLES:

You see, he agrees, too!

MAKEMEDO:

And what's more, just suppose that some mortal
promises to sacrifice a goat to the gods,
then says, "heaven can wait."
We can deal with that little problem, too.

1620

POSEIDON:

And just how would you do that?

MAKEMEDO:

We will wait until our man is preoccupied counting his money
or lying about in a nice relaxing bath. Then, when he least expects it,
we'll send down a bloody great condor to swipe *two* of his goats
and have them flown right up to heaven, double damages!

1625

HERACLES:

He's right, give the birds the scepter.

POSEIDON:

And which way does the Jerkoffalot vote?

HERACLES:

Oi, Jerkoffalot! Cast your vote or get a bashing!

JERKOFFALOT:

Shaggyshaft bang bang!

HERACLES:

You hear? He agrees with me!

1625: Athenian law demanded twice the amount stolen as damages for crimes of theft.

1628: The Jerkoffalot seems to use some broken Greek and say something about a "hairy stick." This may again be sexual comedy and be combined with an obscene gesture with the phallus worn by the actor playing this part.

POSEIDON:

Then I am outvoted. I suppose I must concede.

1630

HERACLES:

Then that's that. (*To Makemedo*) The scepter is yours.

MAKEMEDO:

There is just one more small thing. You can keep Hera, in fact Zeus is quite welcome to her, but I would just ask that the Divine Princess become my wedded wife.

1635

POSEIDON:

Preposterous! It's quite obvious that you have no intention of reaching a settlement. Come on you two, we're leaving!

MAKEMEDO:

OK, if that's the way you want it, makes no difference to me.

(*Calling out*) Chef! Make sure the sauce is nice and sweet!

HERACLES:

Just hold on a minute there, Poseidon, by god! Do we really want to fight a war over a single woman? That's ridiculous!

POSEIDON:

Well, what alternative course of action do you propose?

HERACLES:

We should accept the terms.

1640

POSEIDON:

My dear nephew, you really do have the wits of a jellyfish. It's a red herring, and this fellow's as slippery as an eel. Don't you realize that if Zeus relinquishes his power and gives it to these birds, you'll inherit nothing when he dies? At present, you're his son, and you would stand to get the lot.

1645

1633: Hera was the wife of Zeus and a goddess of women and marriage.

1638: The Trojan War was fought for the sake of Helen.

MAKEMEDO:

Don't take any notice of this old salt, Heracles,
he's telling fish tales again. He's all at sea with the truth.
According to the law, none of your father's property
will go to you, nothing! You won't get an obol, mate,
because quite simply, you're a bastard.

1650

HERACLES:

Are you calling me a bastard?

MAKEMEDO:

Your mother was a mortal, a noncitizen of Olympus,
hence you're a bastard! Why would we call Athena "The Heiress"
if you were Zeus' legal next of kin?

HERACLES:

But what if my father leaves me a nice little nest egg?

1655

MAKEMEDO:

He can't! It's against the law. Poseidon would be the first to contest
the will. He's Zeus' brother and the legal next of kin, so he would get
the lot! You must have heard of Solon's law:

1660

"The legitimate offspring of the deceased will always take
precedence

in matters of inheritance over any living illegitimate offspring.

In the event of there being no legitimate offspring surviving the estate,
it shall be shared among the legal next of kin in all cases."

1665

1648: Pericles' citizenship law of 451 stated that citizen rights could be granted only to those men born to both Athenian parents. Having a foreign mother would therefore disqualify a man from citizenship.

1654: Athena may have been the protector of heiresses as one of her cult functions. A woman could inherit her father's estate if he left no male heir; however, the property would be passed to her husband when she was married.

1656: Under Athenian law a father could leave only a very small part of his estate to an illegitimate son.

1660: Solon was an Athenian legislator in the sixth century.

1665: The heiress of a man's estate was required to marry the next closest male relative on her father's side who would then inherit the property. In this case it would be Poseidon as Zeus' brother.

HERACLES:

Leaving me with . . .

MAKEMEDO:

Absolutely nothing! Come to think of it, did Zeus ever induct you as a member of his family clan?

HERACLES:

No, he didn't. I was beginning to wonder.

1670

MAKEMEDO:

Come on, old chap, don't look so sullen. Cheer up!
You can join the birds and live in a land of milk and honey!

HERACLES:

You know, I think you have just cause for your claim.
I've said it all along, let's give him the girl.

1675

MAKEMEDO:

Poseidon?

POSEIDON:

I still say no.

MAKEMEDO:

Then it's up to the Jerkoffalot to break the deadlock. What do you say?

JERKOFFALOT:

Wollowy willy, Princesses birdie bye bye.

HERACLES:

You heard him, he votes for the birds!

POSEIDON:

Listen, small fry, he said nothing of the sort!

1680

1669: Boys were presented to the *phratry* (clan) by their fathers when they reached adolescence. Membership of a clan group was an essential part of proving Athenian citizenship.

1678: This response is slightly more understandable, but it is impossible to determine if he says that they *should* give the princess to Makemedo or that they *should not*.

He's just chitter-chattering like a swallow.

HERACLES:

That's right! He said give her to the swallows.

POSEIDON:

All right! All right! There are other fish in the sea.
I'll abstain. The birds have it.

HERACLES:

1685

We hereby agree to all your demands.
Now come with us up to Heaven, and we'll arrange
for you to pick up the princess and the scepter.

MAKEMEDO:

Great! and these birds I'm doing will be perfect for the feast.

HERACLES:

1690

You go on ahead. I'll just, eh, stay here for a bit
and help do the birds.

POSEIDON:

Do the birds! Is that all you ever think about, Heracles?
Come on, we're all going now before you polish off the lot.

HERACLES:

Aww, I would have really enjoyed it here!

MAKEMEDO:

I'd better go and get my wedding clothes on!

*(Exit Poseidon, Heracles, Jerkoffalot from scene building roof,
Makemedo and servants through doorway.)*

CHORUS:

In the land of Sycophantia,

1693: The white gown worn for festive occasions mentioned at line 1116.

1694: A city on the island of Chios chosen for the wordplay with *phanein* (denounce).

Where the river Clepsydra flows, 1695
Live the evil bombastbellies
Who use tongues to plow and sow.

With the tongue they reap their harvest
Of bitter fruit and sour wine,
Gorgias and Philippus, 1700
A coarse barbarian kind.

Should we tell these bombastbellies
That here in Athens when we feast,
We first perform the sacrifice
And cut the tongues out of our beasts! 1705

(Enter Herald from offstage.)

HERALD:

Hear ye! Hear Ye! All you blessed creatures,
 you fortuitous, flourishing, airborne birds!
 Please welcome your king to his splendid palace!
 He comes, bringing radiant light, sparkling like a star,
 shimmering, glimmering, and golden, shining bright! 1710
 Not even the sun has ever gleamed with such brilliance!
 He comes with his wife of indescribable beauty,
 wielding the flashing thunderbolt, winged weapon of Zeus!
 The delicate fragrances rise up high to the vault of heaven, 1715
 and the pungent aroma of incense is wafted on the breeze.

*(Enter Makemede, riding in a chariot into the orchestra. He is
 carrying the thunderbolt of Zeus and is accompanied by the Divine
 Princess.)**

1695: The *clepsydra* was the water clock used in court to time the length of speeches (*Wasps* *93 **Water clock**).

1697: These "Tongue-to-Belly Men" earn their livings by bringing actions in the courts.

1700: Gorgias was the renowned rhetorician from Sicily who visited Athens many times from around the mid 420s onward and taught new techniques of argument. Philippus is not known but may have been his son or a pupil.

1705: Sacrificial beasts had their tongues cut out prior to their ritual killing at the altar.

Here he comes! Herald him with song!
 Let the holy Muse sound her divine, sacred melody.

CHORUS:

1720 Be upstanding for the bride and groom!
 Make way, stand clear, let them pass!
 Fly round the lucky couple and honor this beautiful bride.
 1725 Rejoice in this wedding that does so much credit to our city!

CHORUS 2:

The birds are blessed with great, good fortune!
 We must give thanks to this human for our success.
 Serenade him with the nuptial song!
 1730 Sing the wedding hymn for our lord and his princess!

(The chorus sings.)

*Once Zeus and Hera came together
 In wedded bliss, joined forever.
 And to this day man celebrates
 Their holy union tied by the Fates.
 1735 And so it is that we now sing
 Our song to Hymen, our wedding hymn.
 Shimmering Eros held the reins,
 Guiding their chariot, on it came.
 His glittering wings glowing golden,
 1740 To Zeus, the groom, he was beholden.
 And so it is that we now sing
 Our song to Hymen, our wedding hymn.*

MAKEMEDO:

What wonderful music!
 What a glorious hymn!

CHORUS:

1745 Then let us glorify the awesome thunder

1734: The wedding of Zeus and Hera was seen as the prototype of all mortal marriages. Prior to an Athenian wedding, the participants made the preliminary sacrifice (*protelia*) to Zeus and Hera, "The Fulfillers."

1736: Hymen was the spirit of marriage.

that shakes the very core of the earth
and the flashing thunderbolts of Zeus
that light up the sky with their dread power!

*Powerful, mighty lightning bolt
That shakes the earth with its jolt.
Rumbling thunder beneath earth's floor,
That quakes the world and makes rain pour.
Now Makemedo wields Zeus' power,
To shake the earth and make rain shower.
The princess who sat by Zeus' side
Has now been given as Makemedo's bride.*

1750

MAKEMEDO:

Come and join the wedding procession,
my feathered friends, you are all welcome
as my guests in the halls of Zeus
to celebrate my marriage rites.

1755

(Makemedo addresses the Divine Princess.)

Give me your hand, my love,
here, take my wing,
let us lead the dance
as we flutter off together!

1760

CHORUS:

Hooray! Hooray!
Hip, hip Hooray!
Hail to the highest divinity of all!

1765

(Exit all in a procession of singing and dancing.)

—END—

1765: Makemedo is now proclaimed as “highest deity”; however, this does not mean that he has overthrown Zeus. His agreement with the delegation from Olympus is that the birds will rule mankind in conjunction with the gods and act as divine middlemen taking a share of sacrificial offerings but also ensuring that mortals pay proper respect at all times. The sight of an ordinary Athenian elevated to heaven would have been as controversial as it was comical inasmuch as Makemedo’s power of persuasion to turn nonsense into reality has reached this absurdist and hilarious pinnacle.

Birds: Endnotes

Stage Direction: Carrying birds. Birds were attributed with powers of divination, a fact much exploited in the humor of this play. Pausanias refers to the foundation legend of Colonides in Messenia and tells of the settlers being guided there by a lark (4.34.8). There are also foundation myths about ravens guiding colonists to Cyrene, Magnesia, Coraces, Mallus, Lyon, and Cardia, and doves to Cumae and Naples. Yet in the fables of Aesop, the crow was regarded as an unreliable auger (*"The croak of the Crow is not an omen"*), and the jackdaw is portrayed as an imbecilic bird (Bowie [1993], pp. 155–56).

1: Goodhope. The Greek has "Euelpides," which means "Son of Good Hope."

2: Makemedo. The Greek has "Peithetaerus," which means something like "Persuader of his Comrades." The similarity between this character's name (first announced on stage at line 642) and Pisistratus, the sixth-century Athenian tyrant, may well have been intentional on the part of Aristophanes. Makemedo is pronounced "Make me do."

15: Tereus. Tereus was the king of Thrace and was married to the Athenian princess, Procne. He raped Procne's sister, Philomena, and to prevent her from revealing the crime imprisoned her and cut out her tongue. Philomena, however, sent a handwoven tapestry to her sister that communicated her plight. In revenge Procne killed Itys, her only son by Tereus, and served up his cooked flesh to his father at a banquet. Tereus discovered what had been done, and in a fit of

rage he swore to kill the sisters, who fled for their lives. Tereus pursued them with a double axe, but the gods intervened, turning Procne into the nightingale whose call was said to be for Itys. Philomena became the swallow with its chattering unintelligible call, and Tereus was turned into the hoopoe, a bird that is known for splitting wood with its long sharp bill. The name “hoopoe,” or “epops” in Greek, is derived from its call, said to be a searching cry, “pou pou,” from the Greek *pou* (“where”).

17: Jackdaw. The Greek has “Jackdaw, son of Tharraleides.” It is uncertain to whom this refers, possibly a man called Asopodorus who was very small in size. It may also be a reference to an annoying talker.

33: Tribe and clan. The citizens of Athens were organized into ten tribal groups (*phylai*) by the statesman Cleisthenes in 508 B.C.E. The audience may well have sat in these tribal groupings in the theatre. The clan (*gene*) was a family affiliation claimed by Athenians who could trace their line back to old Athenian families, heroes, or cult figures.

42: Rites. These items are all used in sacrificial rites. The pots were used for boiling meat or carrying hot coals to light the sacrificial fire, the basket held the sacrificial knife and other implements, and the myrtle boughs and wreaths were a common feature in many Greek sacred rites.

43: Hustle and bustle. Makemedo and Goodhope are seeking *apragmosyne*—a life free from the hustle and bustle of the city of Athens. However, the very concept of *pragmata* (activity) was often held as an essential and valued element of Athenian culture. Alcibiades is reported by Thucydides (6.18 ff.) as justifying the need for the controversial attack on Sicily by stating that a city that has “hustle and bustle” could find no quicker way to ruin than to suddenly stagnate, and that a city should accept its character and institutions for better or for worse. It is not clear if Aristophanes was alluding to this important speech, made in 415 B.C.E.; however, it is certain that this was a highly charged concept to an Athenian audience in 414.

61: Stage Direction: Window. The servant bird was an actor who must have worn a mask with a huge and threatening beak. There is

no other textual reference to his costume. It may have been that the Servant Bird just popped his head from the door or even appeared from one of the windows in the scene building. This would save the opening of the doors for the more dramatic entrance of the Hoopoe.

Stage Direction: Their birds fly away. It is not known if the jackdaw and crow were real birds, which at this point would have been let loose, or some kind of puppet operated by the actors. It seems that the stage actions required of the birds, to look in certain directions and to open their beaks on cue, would dictate that they were more likely to have been stage props.

70: Secretary Bird. The Greek has “Runner-Bird.” Perhaps road-runner is the closest assimilation to the Greek of a species that may have been the plover. There may be a sexual joke here on *trechô* (fast) similar to the pun on Iris’ title at line 1203. The secretary bird is a known species and seems appropriate here.

79: Dip his ladle. I have tried to re-create the sexual imagery found in the double entendres in the Greek. The names of sea creatures were used as common euphemisms for the vagina, as were references to bowls and basins in this context. Phaleron was one of the ports of Athens, and like all ports, prostitutes could be found there. It is also a play on words with phallus. Soup was a metaphor for sexual liquids, and *toros* (stirring spoon/ladle) has the sense of “drill” or “penetrate” (Henderson 1991, 124). Therefore the secretary bird is envisaged as feeding the Hoopoe’s voracious sexual appetite (*16 **Tereus**).

89: Crow. For the sexual connotations of this word see Henderson 1991, p. 20.

Stage Direction: Hoopoe. The hoopoe is a native bird to Greece and much of Europe. It nests at ground level in small cavities, tree trunks, and thickets. The species has a long curved bill and a distinctive crest that can be raised and lowered, with the crest being erect when the hoopoe is excited. It has a light pink/brown plumage with a striking black and white wing pattern. The wings are rounded, and the hoopoe has a black and white banded fan tail. The hoopoe’s call is a deep “hoo-poo-poo,” and it is often seen perching on bushes, trees, rocks and buildings. It is clear from the text that at

least the crest and bill are represented by the mask and costume worn on stage.

105: Birds molt. Real feathers were probably not a part of the hoopoe's costume. A late fifth-century Attic red figure calyx crater in the Getty Museum in California (Boardman ARFV2 fig. 314) shows a pair of performers dressed in bird costumes. They are wearing tight body stockings painted with dappled markings, large wings, tails, and they wear tufts on their feet. Realistic feathers do not feature as an element in this costuming.

112: Country. Many of Aristophanes' heroes were from the country rather than the city of Athens. Procleon in *Wasps* refers often to his rustic childhood, Strepsiades in *Clouds* complains of his troubles beginning when he marries a woman from the city. The leads of *Acharnians*, *Peace*, and *Wealth* are all farmers.

126: Windbags. The Greek has "No! The son of Scellias makes me fart!" This refers to the politician Aristocrates, an obvious play on words with aristocracy. He was a prominent Athenian and served as a general. He is mentioned by Thucydides (5.19.2; 5.24.1) in connection with the Peace of Nicias in 421. Farting was also used as a sign of overindulgence by the rich (see Henderson 1991, p. 96).

158: Put it on your bill. The Greek has "you can live without the need for a purse."

160: Sesame seeds, myrtle berries, poppy seeds, and mint. All plants connected with marriage, fertility, and sex. The birds are envisioned leading a carefree innocent existence free to indulge in the simple pleasures of life without ever needing to earn money. This connection between food and sex is the catalyst that provides Makemedo with his idea to found a bird city.

175: Look down there. The Hoopoe's home is established in the scene building, which has so far been depicted as a thicket on the side of a mountain. This agrees with Tereus' mythological home of Daulis, one of the highest cities in Greece on the slopes of Mt. Parnassus. This was a region famed for prophecy and close to Apollo's shrine at Delphi, the most important of all Greek prophetic sanctuaries. Here the Hoopoe is asked to look down from the mountain, where he sees clouds, and to look up, where he sees the open sky.

180: Pole. *Polos* has several interlinked meanings. “Vault of the earth” is the obvious expression Makemedo has in mind. Aristophanes cleverly uses the physical staging conditions of the theatre to create his fantastic domain. *Polos* can also mean the center of a threshing-floor (Xenophon *Economics* 18.8), which was a circular level area found in Mediterranean communities for the threshing of corn. This may well have been the origin of the orchestra, the level dancing ground of the theatre. In the center of the orchestra of the Theatre of Dionysus was an altar. Therefore this pun also invests the orchestra with a sense of place prior to the arrival of the bird chorus.

183: The pole becomes a polis. A clever three-way pun on the word *polos* (for the meaning of *polos* see ***180 Pole**). For “polarity” the Greek has *poleisthai*, meaning “revolve” or “frequented,” and *polis* means “city.” Using quick thinking and verbal dexterity, Makemedo has made a rhetorical case for the sky becoming a city and manages to persuade the Hoopoe to support his idea.

186: Melos. Melos tried to remain neutral during the Peloponnesian War and refused to pay tribute to the Delian League. In 416 B.C.E., a large Athenian-led force landed on the island and demanded that it become a member. The Melians resisted and were eventually starved into submission during a bitter winter siege. The fate of the Melians was voted on in the Athenian assembly, and consequently the entire Melian adult male population was executed, and the women and children were sold into slavery.

208: Nightingale aroused. More sexual innuendo, this time directed at Procne, who is now the Nightingale depicted as living happily with Tereus as opposed to her mythical fate (see ***15 Hoopoe**).

Stage Direction: Joined by the Nightingale. The song of the nightingale was probably reproduced by the aulos player. The aulos was an oboelike reed instrument, and many vase paintings of the period show an aulos player accompanying dramatic performances. The Getty calyx crater (see ***105 Birds molt**) depicts such an aulos player.

259: Come one and all. The Hoopoe calls the birds from fields, meadows, marshes, and the sea. His song serves to invoke the Greek countryside and the wide variety of birds that live there. However, there is also a definite sexual subtext present in this song, and many

of the words employed are sexual euphemisms. This seems designed less as titillation than as an illustration of the carefree, idealistic life of the birds. In this song the two basic hedonistic necessities of sex and food merge into one poetic metaphor. It is sex and food that the gods will be deprived of by the birds' blockade and the potent combination of sex and food that forces Heracles to treat for peace at the end of the play.

266: Like a yellowhammer. *Lochmen* meaning "bush" or "thicket" was a common metaphor for vagina. *Kharadrios* can mean "yell" but derives from "torrent" and can mean any kind of conduit including a penis. It was also the name of the yellowhammer, a small bird that nests in gullies. *Epôze* means "cluck" but sounds like *epôtheô*, "push in." So the line could be understood through double entendre as, "The Hoopoe was wasting his time going inside, pushing his penis in the vagina and yelling out."

Stage Direction: Roof of the scene building. Some scholars (Dover 1972, p.145; Dunbar, p. 230) believe that these first four birds appear on the roof of the scene building, while Sommerstein (*Birds* note on 214) states that they may be musicians who take up position on raised hillocks in front of the stage. The jokes that follow alluding to "crests" and "hill-walkers" point to the fact that they were probably elevated above Makemedo and Goodhope who are now on stage. There does seem to be an advance group of some sort from the main chorus of twenty-four members. It may have been that this first group was more elaborately attired while the chorus members were more simply costumed to enable them to sing, dance, and participate in the stage action more easily. A similar choral "advance party" is found in the boys who lead the chorus in *Wasps* (lines 230–316).

282: Philocles. Presumably Philocles' version of the hoopoe story was regarded as a lesser version than the more famous *Tereus* of Sophocles mentioned at line 100. Aristophanes pokes fun at Philocles' physical appearance and birdlike features at line 1295 and again in *Thesmophoriazusae* at line 168.

283: Callias. The first Callias mentioned lived from c. 520 to 440 and was a wealthy aristocrat who negotiated the Peace of Callias with the Spartans in 448. His son Hipponicus served as an Athenian general and died in 422. His son was also named Callias and lived from

c. 450 to c. 366. He squandered the family wealth on his excessive lifestyle and an assortment of sophistic teachers, prostitutes, and hangers-on.

286: Ptera. Greek homes often had fertility symbols consisting of a phallus with wings attached hanging outside their doors.

297: Wings. The *eisodos* was the entrance to the orchestra from where the twenty-four chorus members dressed as birds are now entering. The English word “wings” for the offstage entrances makes for an irresistible pun.

Stage Direction: Military formation. Like the chorus in *Wasps* attacking Contracleon and the slaves (lines 422–25), the bird chorus here attacks in military formation. For the possible practice of recruiting the chorus from the military see *Wasps* *423 ATEEN SHUNNN!

377: Walls, towers, and warships. A veiled reference to the military policies of Athens. The Athenians linked the harbors of Piraeus and Phaleron to the city of Athens with the Long Walls. The Athenians also put most of their defensive resources into their large fleet, which enabled them to maintain military supremacy over the sea.

403: Hoplite fashion. This is a parody of a military command similar to “Ground arms.” Whereas the hoplite was commanded to lower his spear and lay it down next to his shield, the chorus members are ordered to bend their *thumon* (spirit) and lay down their *orgên* (passion). *Thumos* was a euphemism for penis, and the sexual imagery is continued throughout this scene.

409: Learned land of Greece. A similar description is found in Herodotus I.60.3.

430: A real old hand. Aristophanes uses similar language in *Clouds* at line 260.

439: Not the monkey. The Greek has “Unless they give me a promise like the one the knifemaker’s monkey made with his wife.” This may refer to an unknown fable or be a political/sexual joke.

450: Further postings. These orders would have been familiar to an

audience well acquainted with military service. Mobilization orders were posted on the notice boards at the statues of the Eponymous Heroes of the ten tribes of Attica. Some scholars attribute these lines to the chorus leader (Dunbar 1995, note on lines 446–50); however, it is important that Makemedo assumes command of the birds at this point, and these specifically Athenian orders strongly suggest that they are issued by Makemedo.

463: All please recline. The political language of the assembly is mixed with the terminology of the symposium, the dinner and drinking parties frequented by the new Athenian intellectual elite, particularly the sophists and teachers of rhetoric. Both speakers in the assembly and symposium guests wore garlands, and the ritual washing of hands was a normal part of purification rites prior to both activities. However, guests at a symposium reclined on couches, whereas listeners at an assembly meeting would have sat on benches. Makemedo's invitation to the chorus to recline is an indication to the audience that he is about to use the language of rhetoric, which was perceived as being an integral part of a symposium.

467: Heavenly succession. This traditional description of the heavenly succession is found in Hesiod's *Theogony* 133–38. Aristophanes returns to this theme several times throughout *Birds*, in the parabasis at lines 694–703, with the appearance of Prometheus at 1494 (Prometheus helped Zeus defeat the Giants), and throughout the negotiations between the gods and Makemedo at the end of the play.

475: Lark. There is a similar fable noted by Aelian (*On the Nature of Animals* 16.5), who tells the story of a hoopoe from India. A prince was banished with his royal parents, who subsequently died on the long journey they were forced to make. Having no place to bury them, the dutiful son split his own head open with a sword and buried them there. In recognition of this act of piety, the gods turned him into a bird with a great crest.

487: Hat. The triple pronged hat worn by Persian kings is referred to by Herodotus 7.61.1 and seems to have been a version of the Scythian felt hat. Persian rulers are depicted on several vase paintings relating to Athenian drama, and they show the Persian or Phrygian rulers wearing such headgear (Trendall and Webster, figs.

III.1,26 *Phineus*, III.3,34 *Medea*, III.5,6 *Persai*). The Athenian audience would have been familiar with this type of headgear from contemporary tragedy.

510: Scepter. Many vase paintings of the period with dramatic connections and themes depict royal personages holding scepters topped by birds. Agamemnon is depicted on a fourth-century Apulian volute-crater holding such a scepter (Trendall and Webster, fig. III.4,2). Other kings holding bird scepters include Tantalus from Aeschylus' *Niobe* (fig. III, 1,23), Phineus from Aeschylus' *Phineus* (fig. III, 1,26), Proetus from Euripides' *Stheneboea* (fig. III,3,45), and Creon from Euripides' *Medea* (fig. III, 5,4).

512: Birds of the gods. Zeus was associated with the eagle as the king of the birds in art and myth. According to Pausanias (5.11.1), Pheidias' statue of Zeus at Olympia held a scepter crowned by an eagle. The owl was a common symbol of both Athena and the city of Athens. A statue of Athena at Elis had a cock on her helmet, and there may well have been an owl similarly located on Pheidias' statue of Athena in the Parthenon. A gold medallion from Kerch (a Greek city in south Russia) of the fourth century depicts an owl perched on the left cheekpiece of Athena's helmet (Boardman GS2, fig. 102). Apollo is likened to a hawk in the *Iliad* (15. 237–38).

522: Lampon. A once-noted political figure who appears as the first Athenian name witnessing the Peace of Nicias in 421 (Thucydides 5.1.2). Some years earlier, in 443, Pericles made him the leader of the Athenian settlement in Thurii in southern Italy. He was often lampooned by the comic playwrights as a corrupt glutton, and the mention of his name here may also carry a second significance as Lampon had also been the founder of a new city.

537: Sweet oils and dressings. The Greek has "They grate cheese and silphium over you and bathe you in oil and vinegar." Silphium was a plant from the area around Cyrene in North Africa between modern day Egypt and Tunisia. This plant is now extinct, but it seems that the root, stalk, and juice were all used as a pungent flavoring. In Aristophanes' *Knights* (424 B.C.E.) Cleon is accused of lowering the price of silphium in order to encourage the jury men to eat it and cause them to fart so much that they would kill each other with the smell in court (lines 894–98). These lines have a more omi-

nous significance as Makemedo cooks “treasonous” birds with the same dressings at lines 1579–85.

573: Hermes. For a representation of the winged sandals of Hermes on an Athenian red figure cup see Boardman *ARFV1* (fig. 88).

574: Nike. The spirit of Victory was a common motif in Athenian art appearing in sculptural relief on the Parthenon and in representations on the temple of Athena Nike also on the Acropolis. Nike’s wings are depicted on a red figure vase by the Sotades painter (Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 106). A comic rendering of Nike is found driving a chariot containing Heracles on an oinochoe by the Nicias Painter (Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 321).

575: Eros. A calyx crater by the Dinos painter shows a splendid set of wings on the tiny figure of Eros (Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 179).

584: Doctors. Evidence for state-employed physicians can be found in Herodotus (3.131) and Plato (*Gorgias* 514d–515b). One such doctor, named Pittalus, is mentioned in *Wasps* at line 1432.

609: Before he croaks. The crow was said to live far longer than man. A similar proverb is found in Hesiod (*Fr.* 304).

620: Ammon. Ammon was a shrine in Egypt famous for its oracles. Its importance grew in Greece through trade contacts and the founding of the Greek colony of Cyrene in Egypt. Ammon had recently come to the attention of the Athenians because the controversial young general, Alcibiades, had consulted it on the matter of the Sicilian expedition. He received the prophecy that Syracuse would fall to Athenian forces. Although it became a popular site for individuals to visit in the fourth century, it was consulted only by politicians and prominent citizens at the time *Birds* was produced.

640: Forward together. Sommerstein (*Birds*, note on lines 638–40) assigns these lines to Makemedo, reasoning that the Hoopoe would not announce a rush to action and then immediately procrastinate with an offer of lunch. However, this would seem a good opportunity for a contradictory joke, especially after the reference to the shilly-shallying of Nicias.

653: The fox and the eagle. This fable, attributed to Aesop, is told as

follows: The fox and the eagle agreed to form a partnership and live together in a tree. The eagle built his nest in the branches, and the fox made his home between the roots. One day when the fox was out hunting, temptation got the better of the eagle who, using the advantage of his wings, swooped down and stole the fox cubs and ate them in his nest, where the fox could not reach him. The flightless fox could do nothing but shout curses, and the eagle thought that he was safe. The eagle, however, saw some meat on a sacrificial altar, stole it, and took it back to his nest. The meat was still smoldering and his nest caught fire. The eagle's chicks fell out onto the ground into the jaws of the fox, who devoured them before the very eyes of their father.

657: Xanthias! Manodorus! The stage movements of these two slave characters are unclear. It seems that they accompanied Makemedo and Goodhope on their journey, though Aristophanes may be inviting a visual pun on having these characters enter here. If onstage from the beginning, they could have been employed as convenient stage hands.

Stage Direction: Enter Procne. This was probably a nonspeaking actor wearing a bird mask and pretending to play the aulos, a small twin-piped oboelike instrument that was held in place by cheek straps. The real aulos player may well have been onstage but not included in the dramatic action itself. For a pictorial representation of an aulos player wearing cheek straps on a red-figure bell crater by the Cleophon Painter, see Boardman *ARF1*, fig. 174.

670: Beautiful young thing. The Greek has "Look at her lovely gold, just like a virgin!" Young girls of marriageable age in Athens wore gold jewelry during festivals. The Greek puns on *chruoson* (gold) and *kusos* (vagina) (Henderson 1991, p. 131).

706: Gift of a cock. Certain species of birds were favored as love tokens. The species mentioned in the Greek are quail, gallinule, goose, and cock. I have amended the list to keep the phallic references. A red-figure cup by the Penthesilea Painter depicts Zeus wooing Ganymede who holds a cockerel as a symbol of male love (Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 82), and a red-figure cup by the Euaichme Painter shows an older man offering a cockerel to a beardless youth (Boardman *ARFV1*, fig. 373).

710: The crane. Hesiod has a similar phrase: "Mind now, when you hear the call of the crane/Coming from the clouds, as it does year by year:/That's the sign for plowing, and the onset of winter" (*Works and Days* 448–51. tr. Stanley Lombardo).

721: Every important aspect of your lives. Aristophanes puns on the use of the word *ornis* (bird) as a byword for prophetic utterances. In the Greek the list says: *Everything that is important to you in the realm of divination you call a bird: A word of ill omen is a "bird," a sneeze is a "bird," a fortunate meeting, a "bird," a sound is a "bird," a servant is a "bird," and so is a donkey.*

745: Pan. The cult worship of Pan in Athens grew in importance after the battle of Marathon (490), when Pan was said to have appeared and inspired the Athenian army to defeat the Persians. Pan had an important cult site in one of the sacred caves on the Acropolis in Athens.

795: An affair with a married woman. This reference to marital infidelity on the part of a male audience member could be evidence that women were not present in the audience during dramatic performances at this point in the fifth century. For a detailed examination of the scant evidence on this controversial area, see Goldhill, S., "Representing Democracy: Women at the Great Dionysia," in *Ritual, Finance, Politics. Athenian Democratic Accounts Presented to David Lewis*. R. Osborne and S. Hornblower, eds. (Oxford 1994), pp. 347–70.

800: Horsecock. A mythical and fantastic creature half horse/half cock. Aeschylus referred to a "tawny horsecock" in *Myrmidons* (Fr. 134) when describing the prow of a ship, and this image is lampooned by Euripides in Aristophanes' *Frogs* (line 933) as old fashioned and unimaginable. For a pictorial representation of a horsecock on the neck of a Nikosthenic amphora see Boardman *ABFV*, fig. 150).

Stage Direction: Enter Makemedo and Goodhope . . . dressed as birds. It seems that the two men still wear the same masks and basic costume, but during the parabasis they have put on wings and some other form of plumage. This may have been something resembling tail feathers and perhaps some form of dressing around the feet. An Attic black-figure oinochoe in the British Museum shows two per-

formers dressed as birds with feathered wings, red crests, and a speckled costume (Green & Handley, fig. 3). The bird costume of the Getty vase is discussed above (see note on line 106). There is, however, a depiction of two performers accompanied by an aulos player simply wearing large heavy cloaks and sporting headcrests to suggest cocks (Pickard-Cambridge, *Dithyramb, Comedy and Tragedy*, 2nd ed., rev. T.B.C. Webster [Oxford 1968], pl. 27). Whatever the exact nature of the costuming here, we can be certain that Makemedo and Goodhope look quite ridiculous in their respective outfits.

819: Cloudcuckooland. For a detailed examination of the double meanings contained in Cloudcuckooland, see Dobrov 1993, p. 192.

827: Robe. The presentation of Athena's new robe is depicted on Slab V on the eastern section of the Parthenon frieze (Boardman *GS2*, fig. 96.19).

831: Shuffling his shuttle. The *kerkis* (shuttle) was the long flat wooden blade used by women to pack the threads of the weft while weaving. It was also a euphemism for penis.

835: Roosting on rocks. The Greek has "Chick of Ares," a phrase that may have had its origins as a Homeric epithet. There may also be a joke here based around the Areopagus, the "Rock of Ares," a site in Athens where a judicial council met to hear cases of homicide.

858: Chaeris. For a detailed discussion, see Taplin 1993, p. 105.

Stage Direction: Basket and water jug. The basket would hold the sacrificial knife and barley for sprinkling over the altar. It was a traditional element of sacrificial rites to keep the blade hidden from view until the moment of the kill. The water was used to anoint the victim and to cleanse the hands of the sacrifice.

Stage Direction: Enter the Poet. The Poet arrives in Cloudcuckooland seeking patronage for his traditional Pindaric odes. It is clear that the Poet is poorly dressed and very cold up on the heights of Cloudcuckooland. Aristophanes is parodying the system of patronage that existed between poets and their benefactors, perhaps thinking of the sixth-century poet Hipponax, who offered prayers to Hermes to protect him from the cold.

Stage Direction: Enter the Prophet. The prophet was a common feature of ancient life and of course, peddlers of fortunes, messages from the “other side,” and physic knowledge are still predominant in modern society. This Prophet is a wandering soothsayer going from place to place offering interpretations of omens, rather than an agent of one of the recognized mantic sanctuaries. Like the Poet, the Prophet is also poorly dressed and of a disheveled appearance.

963: Bacis. Bacis’ prophecies had been circulating at least since the time of the Persian wars (490–80 B.C.E.), and he is mentioned several times by Herodotus, who even quotes his mantic verses (8.77 and 9.42.2), which are in the same style as those here. The original prophecies of Bacis were said to have been incredibly accurate. It is not surprising to find in Aristophanes, several references to charlatans, false prophets, and ragtag soothsayers attempting to use his reputation for their own enrichment (*Knights* 117–43, 1003; *Peace* 1070).

968: Sicyon and Corinth. A well-known proverbial story told how a man (possibly Aesop) had asked Apollo’s oracle at Delphi how he could become wealthy. The oracle replied that he could do so by owning the land between Sicyon and Corinth (Athenaeus 219a). Sicyon lies directly on the borders of Corinth, therefore there is no land to be had there. Diodorus Siculus also reported a similar prophecy given to the Spartan Phalanthos who was asking the oracle where he could live (8.21.3). It seems that the phrase “the land between Sicyon and Corinth” became a common expression for “nowhere land” and in this sense is akin to the whole concept of Cloudcuckooland itself.

Stage Direction: Enter Meton. Meton invented the “Metonic Cycle,” which calculated that 235 lunar months equaled 19 solar years. Perhaps this discovery was assisted by his sundial mentioned at line 998. Meton’s reputation seems to have become somewhat tarnished around 415 when an apartment complex he owned mysteriously burned down just prior to the sailing of the fleet for Sicily. He then pleaded exemption from military service for his family because of the financial hardship this had apparently caused him. The comic playwright Phrynichus mentions him in a play of the same year as “The one who brought the fountains” (*Fr.* 21), and this may be a reference to his working on the Athenian water supply. Meton was a

wealthy man, and presumably in contrast to the first two interlopers, his costume would reflect his more affluent means.

994: Cothornoi. For a pictorial representation of an actor dressed as Heracles wearing these high boots on the Pronomos vase, see Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 323.

1016: Spartan expulsions. Pericles refers to this practice when comparing Sparta to Athens: "If the Lacedaemonians (Spartans) will cancel their policy of expelling us and our allies as aliens . . . / We leave our city open to all; and we have never expelled strangers"(Thucydides 1.144 and 2.39. tr. P. Woodruff).

Stage Direction: Inspectors. Inspectors were appointed by the Athenian state to maintain control over their allies by reporting the results of their inspections back to Athens, regulating the correct payment of tribute, and implementing appropriate political measures where they saw fit. The text suggests that this character is richly dressed in Persian finery. The appearance of the Inspector before the city has even been properly founded makes for a pointed comment on the policy of Athenian imperialism and Athens' treatment of the allied states. The Inspector arrives carrying two voting urns, the perennial symbol of Athenian justice. The huge citizen juries would cast their votes into either the guilty or the not guilty urn. This symbol of Athenian justice is of course one of the very institutions that Makemedo had wanted to escape.

1054: Decree tablet. Both the city of Athens and her allies had stone inscriptions of Athenian laws set up in prominent places. These were a symbol of Athenian power, and to urinate or defecate on them would be seen as a supreme act of treason. Of course Makemedo has not even finished inaugurating his city, let alone been made an ally, and had decree tablets set up.

1169: War dance. For a visual representation of the Pyrrhic dance on a red figure cup by the Poseidon Painter, see Boardman *ARFVI*, fig. 127.

Stage Direction: Enter Iris. Iris' entrance would have been made on the *machina*, the theatrical crane used in tragedy for the entrance of gods. In the Greek, Aristophanes uses nautical expressions to welcome Iris, as if she were a ship with billowing sails and the *machina*

were a crane unloading cargo. For a depiction of Iris, see Boardman *ARFVI*, fig. 252. Iris' costume would have had wings and a female mask, the role being played by a male actor.

1273: O Lord Makemedo, etc. This kind of excessive praise was frowned upon by ordinary Athenians as the mark of a corrupt Persian ruler. Aeschylus has Clytemnestra welcome Agamemnon home from the Trojan War in similar fashion in *Agamemnon* (lines 895–901).

1367: In the Army now! There was an annual military parade of young men who were ceremoniously awarded their arms by the state after serving one year of their ephobic training. This was held in the theatre, and the audience may well have watched the very same ceremony Aristophanes is parodying on the day *Birds* was performed (Aristotle *Ath. Pol.*, 42.2).

1396: Thrace. The Athenian forces sent to Thrace were composed primarily of mercenaries, and with the bulk of the Athenian forces in Sicily, it appears that it was difficult to find recruits. The campaign failed to capture the Thracian city of Amphipolis in the summer of 414 B.C.E.

Stage Direction: Enter Cinesias. Cinesias was evidently a composer of a new form of dithyrambic poetry, which abandoned the traditional repeating structure of strophic responsion for “preludes,” which were more emotional and elaborate. Cinesias is portrayed by Aristophanes as quite an unsavory character. He is lampooned not only for his vacuous poetry but also for his personal sexual habits and his tall, thin appearance. He was said to be a sickly man who suffered from diarrhea and dabbled in politics.

1429: Newborn writs and summonses. The Greek has “I could fly unnoticed with the cranes and swallow my lawsuits for ballast.” derived from the ancient belief that cranes swallowed stones to help them remain stable in the air.

1461: Spinning top. This type of spinning top was spun using a rope lash which whipped it into a spin. An Attic red figure kylix by the Douris Potter dated 480–70 in the Johns Hopkins University Museum in Baltimore (Hopkins AIA B9) depicts a bearded man and a youth playing with this type of top.

1466: Horsewhipping. The Greek has “Corcyraean wings.” Public officials in Corcyra (Corfu) were said to wield large double-lashed wings to keep order in the assembly.

Stage Direction: Enter Prometheus. Prometheus was a Titan who gave the gift of fire to man and was punished for it by Zeus who bound him to a rock, where an eagle came daily to peck out his liver. There are differing myths about Prometheus, but he is always envisaged as a benefactor to mankind. The Athenians held a festival in his honor, the Promethea, which celebrated fire. Hesiod tells the Prometheus story in both *Theogony* (521–616) and *Works and Days* (47–58).

1504: “Our Dear Prometheus.” Prometheus, whose name means “forethinker,” may well have held a special place in the hearts of Athenians, a people who were proud of their resourcefulness and craftsmanship. This welcome delivered by Makemedo may have been a formulaic greeting from cult practice.

1508: Parasol. In the Scira festival, the priestess of Athena and the priests of Poseidon and Helios walked under a parasol, traveling down from the Acropolis to a sanctuary in Sciron outside the city on the road to Eleusis (Burkert 1985, p. 230).

1529: Jerkoffalots. The Greek has *Triballoi*. The literal translation is “three rubbers.” The number three has special significance for sexual potency, and to “three-rub” means to masturbate (Henderson 1991, p. 121). There was also a Thracian tribe who lived in what is now western Bulgaria known as the Triballians, known for their extreme brutality and complete disregard for the rules of hospitality.

1530: Very hard. A pun on the word *epitribeiês*, which is usually translated as “may you be crushed!” but *tribê* can mean to “rub” or “wear away.” A more accurate translation might be based around the act of masturbation and something like, “Go fuck yourself!” Or “Jerkoff!” (U.S.), “Wanker!” (U.K.). Therefore, a closer translation of the Greek might read: “Oh, so that’s where we get the word *wanker* from!”

1534: Here’s what you must do. In offering Makemedo covert advice on how to defeat the gods, Prometheus is recreating his

mythological role, described in Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* (lines 199–223), where he secretly offered Zeus information on how to defeat Cronus and the other Titans.

1536: Divine Princess. There has been much speculation over the identity of this deity and probably rightly so. Aristophanes chooses a particularly vague title and gives her attributions that certainly relate her to known goddesses, particularly Athena, who was known to have held the key to Zeus' thunderbolts and represent wisdom and common sense. However, as is clearly shown by Makemedeo's response, she is an invention of Aristophanes for his own comedic purposes.

1552: Stool bearers. The Parthenon frieze (east frieze Slab V) depicts stool bearers as part of a religious procession (Boardman *GS2*, fig. 96.19).

1557: Peisander. After serving on the commission responsible for investigating the mutilation of the Herms Peisander went on to support the overthrow of the Athenian democracy in 411 B.C.E. After the demise of the Oligarchs in 410, he fled to Spartan territory, was condemned to death, and was never heard of again. Aristophanes joked about his obesity and cowardly behavior.

1563: A camel would suffice. Peisander's sacrificial animal resembles him, as the Greeks believed camels were dirty, lumbering, stupid, and cowardly beasts, as well as an animal associated with the Persian enemy (see line 278).

Stage Direction: Enter Poseidon, Heracles, and Jerkoffalot. The delegation of three gods arrives, probably on the scene building roof, the area conventionally reserved for the appearances of gods, although in *Birds*, it may also have been utilized for the appearance of the first four birds at 268. The gods must have been instantly recognizable to the audience. So it seems that Poseidon would wear a bearded mask and carry a trident as he is depicted in vase paintings (Boardman *ARFV2*, figs. 289, 316, 383) and Heracles would wear his lion skin and hold a club (Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 323). An Athenian terra cotta figurine of a comic character dressed as Heracles from the early fourth century may be the closest archaeological evidence for how Aristophanes' Heracles may have looked on stage. He has a

large bearded grotesque mask, the lion skin, and headpiece, and wears the traditional comic costume with phallus. He holds his bow and quiver rather than the club (Green & Handley, fig. 34). We can only speculate as to the costume of the Jerkoffalot except that he is attempting to wear a himation, which was the traditional garb of the Athenian gentleman. His mask may have resembled the crude mask of Satyr plays as depicted on the Pronomos vase (Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 323).

1589: There's no oil left in the bottle. The language of the scene is charged with sexual double entendres such as "stoke the fire" (Henderson 1991, pp. 47–48). *Krea*, "meat," was often used as a slang word for the vagina (Henderson 1991, p. 144), and "there's no oil left in the bottle" is a euphemistic way of describing Makemedo's disappointing sexual performance due to his advanced years (*Frogs* line 1208, "lost his bottle of oil"). This mixed metaphor of food and sex appears throughout this play with vivid descriptions of the feeding habits of the birds couched in sexual terms (the Hoopoe's song at line 228). Also, it is important to remember that the intention of the blockade was not only to prevent the gods from receiving nourishment from sacrifices from below but to prevent them from having sexual encounters with mortal women. It is possible to imagine that Aristophanes may have even made more of this running theme here by having his "birds" appear as real women dressed in seductive bird outfits. This would put far greater force behind Heracles' reasons for wanting to quickly treat for peace and partake of the feast and the Jerkoffalot's obvious sexual frustrations. Aristophanes uses a similar visual comic device in *Wasps* (lines 1364–80) when Procleon attempts to pass off a dancing girl as a torch.

1602: Nibble. Gk: *aristaô* ("breakfast" / "lunch") is another possible double entendre for the sexual act (Henderson 1991, p. 186).

Stage Direction: Enter Makemedo, riding in a chariot. A chariot or a wheeled cart seems to have been an integral part of Athenian wedding ceremonies (for a depiction of a wedding chariot on a red figure pyxis by the Marlay Painter, see Boardman *ARFV2*, fig. 343). The text suggests that Makemedo and the Divine Princess (played by a nonspeaking actor) rode into the orchestra, taking center stage, with the chorus dividing into two halves and then circling around them.